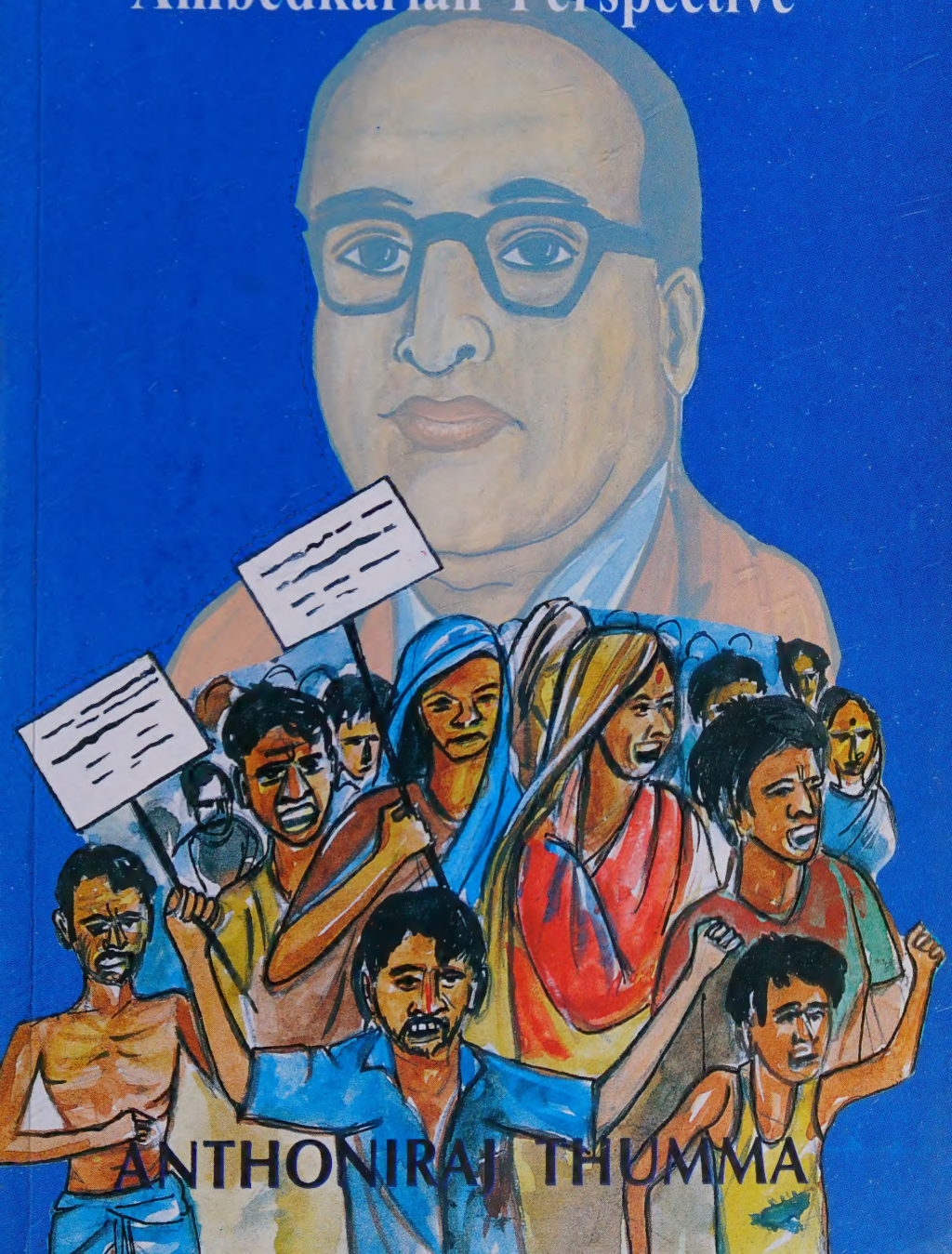
Dalit Liberation Theology

Ambedkarian Perspective



ANTHONIRAJ THUMMA

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Anthoniraj Thumma

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Preface

Blessed are they who are alive to the duty of raising those among whom they are born.

Blessed are they who vow to give the flowers of their days and their nights to further the campaign of resistance to slavery.

Blessed are they who resolve — come good, come evil, come sunshine, come tempest, come honour, come dishonour — not to stop until the Untouchables have fully recovered their manhood.

— Dr. Ambedkar

The "Ambedkar Era" has dawned. The arrival of new millennium shines forth as the dawn of hope for the 200 million Dalits of India. Some Dalit groups have declared it as the "Ambedkar Era" and the "Dalit Millennium". They have resolved resolutely to intensify their struggle and extend their field of action. The quest for Dalit identity and equality, launched by Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has received a boost and is increasing in momentum. This Dalit dynamism began to snow ball already a decade ago with the celebration his Birth Century. This book was originated at that time.

The theme of this book formed my dissertation for the Masters degree in Theology at Pune. I had published portions of it as articles. The fourth chapter of the book appeared as "Ambedkar and the Christians", in *Vidyajyoti* (1993), and a part of the sixth chapter was printed in my book, *Springs from the Subalterns: Patterns and Perspectives in People's Theology.* The original title of this disser-

tation was: "Religion and Dalit Revolution". Since a book with a similar title by Dr. John C.B. Webster has been printed, I am publishing the present revised volume under the original sub-title of the dissertation: "A Perspective of Ambedkar's Dalit Liberation Theology".

The need for publishing the study, even after a gap of nearly a decade, arises from the present conflictual conjecture. Various contextual factors in the situation call for the same. The beginning of this millennium is witnessing the confrontation of the secular egalitarian liberative forces led by the Dalit Movement and fundamentalist exclusivist dominant Hindutva forces led by the Sangh Parivar. The increasing Dalit assertion for self-identity, the declaration of Ambedkar Era, and the consolidation and intensification of the Dalit Movements are leading to militant struggles of the *Dalit Bahujans,* the oppressed majority.

At the same time, the strengthening of the Hindutva forces with the reigns of political power in their hands, is leading to the vigorous implementation of their agenda of establishing the Hindu Rastra/Ram Raj, which is opposed to the majority rule of the Dhamma Raj, the Kingdom of Righteousness. The Sangh Parivar's fundamentalist programmes are aimed to stop the conversions to other religions, to promote saffornization of education, to effect the Hinduisation of the Constitution and other legal, administrative and academic institutions, to continue the attacks and atrocities of the Dalits and other Minorities, and to foster the capitalist globalisation process through privatisation, liberalisation and marketization. In this gloomy situation, the relevance of Ambedkarism shines forth bursting the dark sky.

Dalit Liberation Theology is the product of the Dalit Movements' struggles and reflections for their dignity and

liberty. The present study explores the Dalit Liberation Theology of the Dalit Movement spear-headed by Dr. Ambedkar during 1920 to 1950s. The term "theology" used in this book, a concept Dr. Ambedkar was very wary about, does not mean a discourse about God, his words, deeds and miracles. Nor, does it refer to purely philosophical reflection with no relation to religion. Theology, here, is a religious discourse, though not merely descriptive but critical, as Dr. Ambedkar wanted the philosophy of religion to be. By "religious" discourse, we do not mean only theistic god-talk.

There are secular non-theistic religious traditions in India, for whom the terms like religious, spiritual, sacred, holy and divine would mean the ultimate, absolute, transcendental, and humane values, principles and aspirations, as well as striving for realisation, perfection, happiness and integral liberation from all bondages. Dr. Ambedkar's Philosophy/ Theology follow this tradition; so the terms mentioned above should not be confused with theistic meanings, unless used in the book in relation to theistic religions. Basically, theology in this book means the religious philosophy and teaching of Dr. Ambedkar and the thought of his Movement.

"Dalit Liberation Theology" refers to the articulation of the dialogical critical reflection of the Dalits arising from their transformative pathos and praxis. It is the outcome of the suffering and struggle of Dalit victims. Dalit Liberation Theology has its own Dalit Critical Principle and Dalit Hermeneutics, which from the perspective of the erstwhile Untouchable Slaves, evaluate, critique and interpret all religions, ideologies, political parties, governments and other social organisations. Dalit Liberation Theology presented in this book is the core of Dalit Ideology/Dalitism, which is its value system, principles and methodology. Its main values and principles are justice — social, economic, political —

especially to the oppressed, and liberty, equality and fraternity to all in the society. This book demonstrates, how with these principles and methodology, Ambedkarian Movement critiqued and reinterpreted the function of religion in the society, the role of religion in the Dalit Revolution, and the position of various religions and ideologies in the Dalit liberative praxis for a just social order.

I had dedicated this dissertation to *"Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar,* the Champion of Dalit Revolution and Human Rights on the celebration of his Birth Centenary, and to *Mr. Anil Kumar*, the young Dalit Martyr of Chundur who was killed by the police". I again humbly dedicate this book to both of them, the Master and his worthy Disciple, with a hope many more will follow them in the path of Dalit Revolution for total liberation.

CHAPTER 1

Dalit Revolution is on...

Tell the slave that he is a slave and he will revolt against his slavery.

— ***Ambedkar***

1.1. The Urgency and Importance of the Problem

1.1.1. From Contradictions to Revolution

> We must begin by acknowledging first that there is complete absence of two things in Indian society. One of these is equality. On the social plane we have in India a society based on privilege of graded inequality which means elevation for some and the degradation of others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against the many who are living in abject poverty. On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social life and economic life we will have inequality.... We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment, or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up.[1]

This prophetic warning of Ambedkar went unheeded. It has resulted in the violent revolution that is on in India now. As the eminent sociologist M.N. Srinivas has affirmed, in India we are now "living in a revolution"[2] which is "threatening India's very existence as a single political entity."[3] Today India is facing series of crises, one inter-linked to the other and feeding on each other.[4] Militant nationalist movements for secession or self-autonomy, and fundamentalist religious movements are becoming increasingly violent.[5]

Of these, an important one is the militant Dalit movement waged for the recognition of humanhood, equal respect and dignity, socio-economic justice and for participation in decision-making power. The revolutionary struggle of the erstwhile slaves of India and the ex-Untouchables, which M.N. Srinivas "continues to regard as a basic one"[6] has become a treacherous caste war. It results in extremely ruthless and barbaric forms of organized violence leaving many dead including women, children and old people, as it was witnessed in Chundur in Andhra Pradesh, and Kumher in Rajasthan.[7] These increasing caste atrocities[8] are the outcome of the desperate attempts being made by the high castes to hold on to the prestige, position and privileges they enjoyed so far through "caste apartheid".[9] The Untouchable slaves,[10] who have become aware, refuse to accept inhuman treatment, organise themselves[11] under the 'Dalit' banner and assert their "Dalit dignity". They have launched the Dalit revolution for liberty, equality and fraternity inspired by Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), the pioneering champion of Dalit movement.

1.1.2. Dalit Struggle and Religion

One of the serious questions the Dalit action groups[12] face is regarding the dubious role of religion. While Hinduism forged the shackles of caste-system, other religions in India have helped to strengthen its hold instead of loosening the bonds. As K. Wilson, a people's philosopher points out, inspite of the numerous powerful incarnations, spiritual gurus and religious traditions and institutions in India, the inhuman social system remains entrenched.[14] Though Dalits have joined every religion in India and have become Dalit Muslims, Dalit Sikhs, Dalit Christians and Dalit Buddhists their dream for human dignity remains unrealized.[15]

Indian religions have become instruments of oppression by their fatalistic devaluating doctrines, such as the doctrine *Karma* (Hinduism), 'desirelessness' (Buddhism), 'original sin' (Christianity), and 'submission' (Islam). By these Dalits are reinforced in their enslavement.[16] The scriptures are used to justify and legitimize their slavery: "Rarely do we hear a religious voice against violations of human rights. In India the religious establishment is one with the oppressive political forces on all crucial issues. They operate hand in hand."[17] And so the Dalit poet, V.L. Kalekar cries out:

I reject your culture
I reject your Parmeshwar centred traditions
I reject your religion-based literature.[18]

Given this situation, what should the Dalit movements do with regard to religion? Strive to abolish religions as E.V. Ramaswamy campaigned? Or ignore religion and take up economic issues so that religion may die a natural death having lost its purpose as Marx advocated?[19] Or try to harness the motive force, spiritual potential and moral strength of religion in order to enlighten, transform and empower the Dalits and oppressed to effectively and meaningfully wage revolutionary struggle for total liberation of all? This study tries to face this urgent problem squarely and tries to find an answer in the light of Ambedkar's struggle and thought.

1.2. The Purpose and Plan of the Study

1.2.1. Questions of the Study

Let me spell out the problem in the form of questions: Should the Dalits reject all religions that oppressed them, and remain religionless in order to gain psycho-cultural and socio-economic liberation? The anti-caste firebrand, crusader of Self-Respect League and Dravidian Movement, E.V. Ramaswamy, answered this question in the positive:

Caste is a curse which must be abolished;
To abolish caste, religion must be abolished;
To abolish religion, God must be abolished.[20]

Many Dalit revolutionaries like Shyam Sunder of Bhim Sena,[21] the Dalit Panthers,[22] and the leaders of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasaba,[23] also go for a purely secular struggle and shun religion. But, for many Dalits and activists who have joined the Dalit struggle, the religious question still persists. The reasons for this dilemma are many. Is it possible to remove religion completely? Even if the activists shun religion and avoid talking about it, are not ordinary Dalits still under its grip? Is religion totally oppressive, can it not be liberative and contribute to the over throw of exploitative regimes and systems, as it has done in some Latin American countries and nearer home in Philliphines? Can Indian religions contribute similarity to the abolition of casteism and assist the Dalit revolution? Why did Ambedkar, the pioneer of Dalit revolution, insist much on the need of religion? According to him, what is the function of religion in the Dalit liberation? Why did he condemn other religions? At the same time, why he urged the Dalits to embrace Buddhism?

Can other religions be similarly reinterpreted, as Ambedkar did in the case of Buddhism, to unleash the liberative elements contained in them? If so, how is it to be done? What was the hermeneutical method of Ambedkar? In short, the basic question is what is the role of religion in Dalit revolution — Dalit revolution with or without religion?

1.2.2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study, therefore, is to search for the answers to the above mentioned questions which are very relevant to the Dalits in the struggle for justice and

equality. This study strives to gather together the insights of Ambedkar on these questions and present them in a systematic manner. It undertakes to spell out the Theology of Religions of Ambedkar in the context of Dalit revolutionary struggle. It pays more attention to the hermeneutical methodology of Ambedkar with a view to carry forward his new philosophy/theology.

Ambedkarian Theology of Liberation has been much neglected by the Indian theologians/philosophers.[24] Some do not even consider him a philosopher deeming him to be more a man of action with practical mind, than a serious thinker.[25] This injustice done to him needs to be set right at least during the Ambedkarian centenary now being celebrated. I hope this study will serve as my small contribution to this cause and the cause of the Dalit revolution that struggles to usher in the Kingdom of Righteousness.

1.2.3. Plan of the Study

The plan of the study is as follows: after the introductory chapter, the second chapter deals with the liberation theology of religions highlighting the necessity of religions, its functions and importance in Dalit revolution. Discussion on Ambedkar's interpretation of philosophy of religion and the criterion to judge the religions is also included in the second chapter. Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism, other theistic religions and the ideologies, Gandhism and Marxism, are explained in the third chapter. Ambedkar's critique of Indian Christianity whose majority members are Dalits, is summarised separately in the fourth chapter. The Dalit hermeneusis resulting in the Neo-Buddhist reinterpretation and the hermeneutic principles involved in the process are examined in the fifth chapter. The sixth chapter attempts at a synthesis and synopsis of Ambedkarian Liberation Theology along with the assessment of his contribution to

Theology. The last chapter sums up the position on the role of religion in Dalit revolution.

1.3. Methodological Clarifications

1.3.1. The Method

The method used in the study is direct exploratory synthesis and compilatory. It makes the original author speak to the reader by quoting directly the original words of the author. Thus it turns out to be a compilation of the writings of the author on the subject in discussion. It may seem like a string of quotations, but given the controversial and polemical nature of the subject and of the author, this seems to be the better way of doing this study.

So I have tired to keep my comments and interpretations to minimum in the main chapters that expose the thought of Ambedkar. In order to be faithful to his original thought, I have read and used the original sources rather than the studies made on him. These studies are utilized only as secondary supportive material for my conclusions derived directly from Ambedkar's writings.

My approach to the study of Ambedkar is dialogical and practical. Its aim is to learn from him through critical listening, in order to continue the struggle for Dalit liberation in a better manner. Hence, purely theoretical questions are avoided.

1.3.2. The Limitations and Assumptions

I am aware of the limitations and assumptions of this study some of which are mentioned below:

1. The detailed description of the life events and influences on the thinking of Ambedkar could not be undertaken given the limitation of space in the study.[26]

2. An historical study and perspective, of the works and

writings of Ambedkar utilized in the study, also does not find a place. It is assumed that from 1936 to 1956 Ambedkar did not substantially change his position in the matters discussed in this study. Besides most of the writings used in the study belong to 1950s, the last and most mature period of Ambedkar's life and thought.

3. Ambedkar was a many-splendoured personality and expert in many fields such as sociology, economics, history, international law and politics. My discussion in this study is limited primarily to his philosophical, theological, religious and ethical thought.

4. As I do not claim to be an expert in any of the fields mentioned above my conclusions and interpretations are only tentative and provisional. They are to be confirmed in dialogue with the Ambedkarians.

5. The perspective I have taken in my present study on Ambedkar is also limited to the question of the role of religion in the Dalit liberation. Hence, the readers need to be cautioned that this is only a narrow-view of Ambedkar whose life-struggle was varied, activity diverse and thought comprehensive.

6. Due to the method and plan adopted, this study is full of quotations, at times large, and unavoidable repetitions, which I hope, will serve for more clarity on the subject, rather than being redundant. Though I could have access to most of the speeches and writings of Ambekdar available in English on the subject discussed in the study, I am unable to use the material which is in his original Marathi language; this limitation of mine has many disadvantages.

1.3.3. The Terminology

Some of the terms used in the study require clarification as I am using them in a special sense as explicated below:

1. *Dalit:* The term 'Dalit' whose Sanskrit and Hebrew root *dal* means broken and crushed, is the name the untouchable indigenous people of India have given to themselves. Though 'Dalit' could refer to any oppressed person, in this study it is used to refer to the erstwhile Untouchables, who are presently termed as the Scheduled Castes in the Constitution of India.[27]

2. *Revolution:* The term 'revolution' more often than not evokes a bloody, violent and sudden destruction, permanent alteration of the existing socio-economic political structures, and the overthrowing of the governments. As used in this study it refers to a radical and total transformation of unjust socio-economic-political-cultural structures which could be realized also in a gradual non-violent manner, and perfected more and more; and so is not permanent.[28]

3. *Theology:* The term 'theology' in my understanding, and as used in this study, refers to the critical reflection of a person or community on the ultimate goals and meaning of their existence, and on the absolute humane-divine values they live by. In this sense I do not distinguish between Philosophy and Theology. I personally prefer the term 'wisdom', though I could not use it here as it is not currently in circulation in this sense.[29] *Liberation Theology* as used by me, refers to the critical, dialogical reflection on the liberative praxis (to realize the ultimate goal of freedom from all forms of oppression), in the light of collective wisdom.[30]

NOTES

1. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* selected and edited by Bhagwan Das, Jullunder, Bheem Patrika Publications, 1969, Vol. 2, pp. 184-187.
2. The title of the article by M.N. Srinivas, "On Living in a Revolution" in *Economic & Political Weekly* 23, 13 (March 30, 1991), pp. 833-835.

3. *Ibid.,* p. 835.
4. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 833.
5. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 833-835.
6. *Ibid.,*.p. 834. See also, G. Omvedt, *Dalits and th Democratic Revolution,* New Delhi, Sage, 1994.
7. These caste battles, that resulted in the death of many Dalits and others, shocked India. For a report on the Chundur massacre of August, 1991 where 8 Dalits were butchered, see the findings of the Samata Sangatana headed by K. Ilaiah, "Upper Caste Violence: Report on Chunduru Village", in *Economic and Political Weekly,* 26, 36 (September 7, 1991), pp. 2079-84. For the report in the Rajya Sabha by the Minister of State for Home Affairs, M.M. Jacob about the Kumher caste battle that lasted a week in June 1992 and left 15 people and 40 cattle dead and 47 people injured; see, "Kumher Probe to be Expedited", *Times of India,* Bombay, July 21, 1992, p. 6.
8. For the list of atrocities from 1947-1979, see N.D. Kamble, *Atrocities on Scheduled Caste in Post-Independent India,* New Delhi, Ashish Published House, 1981; M.J. Akbar, *Riot After Riot,* New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1988, also describes some atrocities on Dalits besides the communal riots; see also K.S. Subramanian, "Violence Against Scheduled Castes in India, Overview, Problems, Prospects," in *Man and Development* 9, 1 (March 1987), pp. 27-42; the Cover story of *India Today,* 3, 19 (October 1-15, 1978), pp. 44-45; *Dalit Voice,* Bangalore, that regularly reports on the atrocities and the Dalit problems. For atrocities on Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, see, K. Balagopal, "Post-Chundur and Other Chundurs", in *Economic and Political Weekly,* 26, 42 (October 19, 1991), pp. 2399-2405. For the upto date account see the Reports of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; and the Human Rights Watch Report, *Broken People,* New York, 1999.
9. Cf. V.T. Rajshekar, *Apartheid in India, An International Problem,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1983 (1978). This book was later published as *Dalit, The Black Untouch-*

ables of India, Atlanta, Clarity Press, 1987. For the present condition of the Dalits, which has not improved considerably after Independence, see. V.T. Rajshekar, *Dalit, The Black Untouchables of India;* J. Michael Mahar, ed., *The Untouchables in Contemporary India,* Tricson, The University of Arizona Press, 1972; A.M. Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata,* Bangalore, CISRS, 19990; W. Fernandes, ed., *Inequality, Its Bases and Search for Solutions,* New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1986; and J. Maliekal, *Caste in India Today,* Bangalore, Centre for Social Action, 1978.

10. Ambedkar considered untouchability as the worst form of slavery; see *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 17 and Vol. 9, p. 401.
11. On the Dalit struggles for equality, see. J.R. Kamble, *Rise and Awakening of Depressed Classes in India,* Delhi, National Publishing House, 1979; N.D. Kamble, *Depressed Castes and their Struggle for Equality,* New Delhi, Ashish Publishing House, 1983; Jose Kananaikil, *Scheduled Castes and the Struggle Against Inequality,* New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1983; A.M.A. Ayrookuzhiel, *The Dalit Desiyata,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1990; E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement,* New Delhi, 1992; and J. Gokhale, *From Concession to Confrontation,* Mumbai, Popular, 1993.
12. For the list of Dalit action groups, see *Dalit Organizations: A Directory,* New Delhi, Dalit Vikas Samiti, ISI, 1989.
13. For a debate on this problem, see the articles by C. Parvathamma, Walter Fernandes and Victor S. D'Souza in, Jose Kananaikal, ed., *Scheduled Castes and the Struggle Against Inequality,* pp. 98-154.
14. Cf. K. Wilson, *The Twice Alienated,* Hyderabad, Booklinks Corp., 1982, p. 13.
15. *Ibid.,* p. 74.
16. K. Wilson, *Political Philosophy of the Oppressed Indians,* Hyderabad, Booklinks Corp., 1983, pp. 3-4.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Quoted in Barbara Joshi, ed., *Untouchables: Voices of the*

Dalit Liberation Movement, New Delhi, Select Book Service Syndicate, 1986, p. 83.

19. Cf. Stan Lourdusamy, *Religion as Political Weapon,* Calcutta, Multi Book Agency, 1990, pp. 179-180.
20. Quoted by Somen Das, "Christian Response to Some Selected Movements for Social Change in India in the 19th and 20th Centuries", in Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds., *The Gospel Among Our Hindu Neighbours,* Bangalore, Partnership in Mission-Asia, 1983, p. 34. See also R.L. Hardgrave, Jr., *The Dravidian Movement,* Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1965.
21. See, B. Shayam Sunder, *They Burn,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1987, p. 10.
22. Cf. W.N. Kuber, *B.R. Ambedkar,* New Delhi, Govt. of India, 1978, pp. 151-153.
23. It was born out of the Karamchedu Massacre of Dalits in 1985. Cf. V.T. Rajshekar, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Three Commandments,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1989, p. 13.
24. One comes across hardly any reference to Ambedkar in the works of Indian theologians (except the Dalit theologians) though they often refer to Marx and Gandhi.
25. See J.R. Jatava, *Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* Agra, Phoenix Publishing Agency, 1965, p. i.
26. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 3-5.
27. Cf. V.T. Rajshekar, *Dalit,* pp. 43ff. See James Massey, *Roots: A Concise History of the Dalits,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1991.
28. Cf. S. Kappen, *Liberation Theology and Marxism,* Puntamba, Asha Kendra, 1986, pp. 125-126.
29. Cf. R. Panikkar, "Indian Theology: A Theological Mutation", in M. Amaladoss *et. al.,* eds., *Theologizing in India,* Bangalore, TPI, 1981, pp. 34 and 38. See A. Thumma, *Wisdom of the Weak,* pp. 36-42.
30. As S. Kappen says, G. Gutierrez's definition of Liberation Theology "makes little sense in India"; see *Liberation Theology and Marxism,* p. 44. Note my definition differs from S. Kappen's definition in *ibid.,* p. 43; mine is applicable to all religions and ideologies.

CHAPTER 2

Dalit Liberation Theology of Religion

Man does not live by bread alone.
*— **Jesus** (Mt. 4.4) quoted by Ambedkar*

2.1. Introduction

Religion is essential, as the basis of social life, for the transformation of the minds of the people, and for setting up moral ideals and motivating the people to adhere to them. Besides these functions, Ambedkar emphasises the role of religion as a revolutionary force in the liberation of Dalits for setting their minds free from the slavish bonds of inferiority, submissiveness and dependence, and to lead them through cultural revolution to the social revolution of the radical alteration of unjust socio-economic and political structures.

The present chapter takes up the discussion of Ambedkar's liberative theology/philosophy of religions. Though Ambedkar has not dealt academically with theology/philosophy of religion, as he is neither a professional philosopher nor an academic theologian, he did write on it in the context of his denunciation of Philosophy of Hinduism, that according to him, is enslaving the Dalits.

Beginning with the presentation of Ambedkar's views on the need, importance and functions of religion in society this chapter goes ahead to refer to his interpretation of "religion" which will be clarified more in the next chapter. The last part of the present chapter takes up the important question of the criterion to judge the value of religions which for Ambedkar is a vital part of Philosophy of Religion. How useful is a religion to promote justice and social de-

velopment? Does it help liberate the Dalits and realize their humanity? In answers to these questions lies the value of a religion.

2.2. The Need and Function of Religion

2.2.1. The Necessity of Religion

Ambedkar's conviction that religion is essential for human social existence was unshakable. With wisdom and vigour he defended this conviction against the secularists' and Marxists' attack on or indifference to religion. His biographers testify to this deep-rooted conviction in Ambedkar. D. Keer affirms,

> He believed in the necessity of religion. He said that a poor man mad with hunger did not resort to theft not because he feared the legal consequences, but because of the healthy pressure his religion exercised over his mind. He held that religion had a direct connection with the heart; the laws, with reason. In life, emotion played a predominant part. Hence the importance of religion in the building of man. He often said that whatever good points he had in him were the fruit of religion.[1]

W.N. Kuber also attests, "He wanted religion, but did not want hypocrisy in the name of religion. Religion to him was the driving force for human activity. Man cannot live by bread alone. He had a mind which needs food for thought. He considered the foundations of religion to be essential to life and practices of society."[2]

In clear terms Ambedkar insisted that "secularism did not mean abolition of religion."[3] During the second *Dhamma Deeksha* ceremony, in which he initiated large number of followers to Buddhism, on the next day of his own conversion, he cautioned them against Marxist Philosophy's neglect of religion: "Man cannot live by bread alone. He has a mind which needs food for thought. Religion instills hope

in man and drives him to activity. Hindu religion has watered down the enthusiasm of the downtrodden. And I found it necessary to change my faith and embrace Buddhism."[4]

Though he found similarities between Buddhist ethics and Marxian axioms, and has in fact used Marxian principles to reinterpret Buddha's *Dhamma* (as we shall show later), he shunned the adoption of Marxism. Among the reasons he put forth for doing so, the Marxist neglect of religion along with its advocacy of violence, is an important one.[5] What will hold the society together when the "withering away of the state" takes place as proposed by the Communists? To this question of Ambedkar, the Communists have no satisfactory answer. Hence he admonishes the Communists and others, "Will it be succeeded by anarchy? If so, the building up of the Communist State is an useless effort. If it cannot be sustained except by force and if it results in anarchy when the force holding together is withdrawn, what good is the Communist State? The only thing which could sustain it after force is withdrawn is Religion."[6]

As for himself, Ambedkar proclaimed that his personal philosophy of life and political involvement is based on religion:

> Positively, my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. Let no one however say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution. I have not. *My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science.* I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.[7]

To a caste Hindu deputation from Nasik, that tried to dissuade him in November 1935 from taking drastic steps, he confessed, "Some people think that religion is not essential to society. I do not hold this view. *I consider the foundations of religion to be essential to life and practices of*

society..." And he concluded saying that "he had strong religious sentiments according to his conception of religion, but he had no faith in Hinduism as he hatred hyprocrisy."[8]

2.2.2. The Importance of Religion

Religion is a social force especially in India where religion plays a vital role in the lives of people. Most of the decisions made and actions performed by many of the Indians are still determined by religion. Given this fact, Ambedkar is surprised to find that some Hindus, whose religion even classifies times and places as auspicious or not, pay little attention to religion, and either belittle religion or become different to it. To them Ambedkar provides a detailed description of religion's role in Indian society. That is why he insisted:

> Religion as a social force cannot be ignored. Religion has been aptly described by Herbert Spencer as "the weft which everywhere crosses the warp of history." This is true of every Society. But Religion has not only crossed everywhere the warp of Indian History it forms the warp and woof of the Hindu mind.[9]

Especially, the life of Hindu, from his birth to death is saturated by his religion. His food, dress, occupation, marriage, every such detail is determined by it.[10]

Another reason why Ambedkar lays stress on religion as a social force is, because of the ideal that it provides to people along with the motivation to realize the same. Religious ideals are more powerful than the practical secular ideals he explains. The force of the religious ideal lies in the sanction that is attached to it by religion. Ambedkar reminds those who deny the importance of religion to pay heed to this vital function religion performs in a society: "Besides, Religion is a social force. As I have pointed out Religion stands for a scheme of divine governance. The

scheme becomes an ideal for society to follow. The ideal may be non-existence in the sense that it is something which is constructed. But although non-existent, it is real."[11]

While there is a conflict between the ideal of religions and a secular practical ideal, that is a desire of instinct or earthly gain, it is the religious ideal that wins. It is because the purely secular ideals' "power depends upon its power to confer material benefit. This shows how great is the difference in the potency and sanction of the two ideals over the human mind. A religious ideal never fails to work so long as there is faith in that ideal. To ignore religion is to ignore a live wire."[12]

Those who misunderstand Ambedkar to be against religion or advocating the destruction of religion should remember that he called the destruction of religion of rules and not of principles.[13] On such people he tries to impress upon the necessity of religion:

> While I condemn a Religion of rules, I must not be understood to hold the opinion that there is no necessity for a religion. On the contrary, I agree with Burke when he says that, 'True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true Civil Government rests, and both their sanction'.[14]

The reasons why Ambedkar deems religion to be essential to personal as well as social life are: Religion exercises a great pressure of moral power over a person's heart and mind. It builds up the person. It is a powerful driving force for human activity; for, it instills hope. Only religion can satisfy the human being who is not satisfied with material things. A liberative religion alone can transform the human minds of those who are socio-culturally enslaved, especially the Dalits. Ambedkar aptly illustrates "the dominion which religion exercises over the minds of men."[15] He

says that, the millionaires in India who obey the penniless Sadhus, and the Plebeians of Rome who obeyed the Oracles of Delphi and lost power, prove "the power of religion over man."[16]

In the same way, Ambedkar considered religion to be essential for social practice and order, for the reason that religion can hold together society due to the moral force it exercises over the members. Its ethical power can prevent social evils, crimes and atrocities, Religion alone can foster equality, liberty and fraternity and the enforcement of justice and order. Thus religion is an important governing principle in the society. So much so, raising the question. "What is religion? Why is it necessary?", Ambedkar answers, "That which governs people is Religion. That is the true definition of Religion".[17]

Besides, religion is also an important source of power in the society. Ambedkar vehemently attacks the Socialists who fail to discern the influence of religion over people and its function as effective power-source in Indian society:

> The fallacy of the Socialists lies in supposing that because in the present stage of European Society, property as a source of power is predominant, that the same is true of India or that the same was true of Europe in the past. Religion, social status and property are all sources of power and authority, which one man has, to control the liberty of another.[18]

2.2.3. The Functions of Religion

In order to ascertain the function and purposes of religion we need to separate religion from theology Ambedkar insists: "The primary things in religion are the usages, practices and observances, rites and rituals. Theology is secondary. Its object is to rationalize them."[19] In the same way, religion should also be distinguished from what is considered to be

supernatural: "Equally necessary it is not to think religion as though it was super-natural. To overlook the fact that the primary content of religion is social, is to make nonsense of religion."[20]

It is an error to view religion as an individual, private and personal matter. Nor is it to be mistaken as the flowering of the special religious instinct inherent in the individual nature: "The correct view is that religion like language is social for the reasons that either is essential for social life and individual has to have it because without it he cannot participate in the life of the society."[21] Having made the nature of religion clear, Ambedkar spells out its functions:

1. From the savage society to our present day the main social function of religion is, according to Ambedkar, concerned with life, life processes and the preservation of life. The religious ceremonies are connected with the stages of life with events like birth, puberty, marriage, death, sickness, war, drought, pestilence or concerned with the cultivation of food grains and cattle that cater to human social life.[22] Even magical practices, taboos and totems used by the savage society in religious ceremonies, and the worship of God that later replaced magic, "does not alter the fact that God's place in religion is only as a means for the conservation of life and that the end of religion is the conservation and consecration of social life."[23] This is equally true for the present society, though this essence of religion is hidden or forgotten: "But the life and the preservation of life constitute the essence of religion even in the present day society is beyond question."[24]

2. Ambedkar asserts that the best statement regarding the purpose of religion that he came across is given by Charles A. Ellwood who had written:

> Religion projects the essential values of human personality and of human society into the universe as a whole. It inevitably arises as soon as man tries to take a valuing attitude toward this universe, no matter how small and mean that universe may appear to him... What the reason does for ideas, religion does then, for the feelings. It universalizes them; and in universalizing them, it brings them into harmony with the whole of reality.[25]

Social values are universalized and also, as C.A. Ellwood continued to show, they are also spiritualized by religion for the realization of a specific social purpose. Ambedkar concludes: "Religion emphasizes, universalizes social values and brings them to the mind of the individual who is required to recognize them in all his acts in order that he may function as an approved member of the society."[26]

3. Maintaining the social control and social order is the important function of religion. Religion acts as an agency of social control by prohibiting the individual's beliefs and practices that go contrary to the good of the larger group. Thus religion is a powerful means of social control, more powerful than the law and Government. Ambedkar again quotes Ellwood to strengthen his argument: "Without the support of religion, law and Government are bound to remain a very inadequate means of social control. Religion is the most powerful force of social gravitation without which it would be impossible to hold the social order in its orbit."[27]

2.2.4. Religion as Revolutionary Force

The most important reason, as far as the Dalit revolution is concerned, why religion must be taken seriously is that a proper socio-economic and political change can be brought about only through a culturo-religious revolution. Ambedkar not only insists that social and religious problems have a bearing on politics, but also convincingly demonstrates that

political revolutions are brought about, or at least preceded by, socio-religious revolutions which first usher in a cultural revolution:

> On the other hand one can say that generally speaking History bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The religious Reformation started by Luther was the precursor of the political emancipation of the European people. In England Puritanism led to the establishment of political liberty. Puritanism founded the new world. It was Puritanism which won the war of American Independence and Puritanism was a religious movement. The same is true of the Muslim Empire. Before the Arabs became a political power they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by the Prophet Mohammad. Even Indian History supports the same conclusion. The political revolution led by Chandragupta was preceded by the religious and social revolution of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak. It is unnecessary to add more illustrations. These will suffice to show that the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people [28]

Religion thus plays no minor role in the emancipation of the mind and soul of the people, which is a preliminary necessity for the socio-political transformations of society. Revolutionary social change needs religion as important motivating, conscientizing, empowering and energizing factor. Especially, for the transformation of the minds of the Dalits and their empowerment religion is essential. For, as Ambedkar points out to them in no ambiguous terms, they are not only deprived of and lack man-power and money-power, but also mental strength:

> As regards mental strength, the condition is still worst. The tolerance of insults and tyranny without grudge and complaint has killed the sense of retort and revolt. Confidence, vigour and ambition have completely vanished from you. All of you have become helpless, unenergetic and pale. Everywhere, there is an atmosphere of defeatism and pessimism. Even the slightest idea that you do something does not enter your mind.[29]

"To abolish caste, change your religion", Ambedkar campaigned among the Dalits. In the Mahar Conference held at Bombay on 30-31 May, 1936, he urged his people: "In short, so long as we remain in a religion which teaches a man to treat another man as leper, the sense of discrimination on account of caste which is deeply rooted in our minds cannot go. *For annihilating castes and untouchability from among the untouchables, change of religion is the only antidote."*[30] Towards the end of this long and well argued speech he invited the Dalits, "I tell you, religion is for man and not man for religion. If you want to organize, consolidate and be successful in this world change this religion."[31]

2.3. Ambedkar's Philosophy of Religion

At the outset of his book, *Philosophy of Hinduism,* Ambedkar takes up the discussion on the meaning of "Philosophy of Religion."[32] Due to two facts, he confesses that he is unable to get a clear idea about it. Firstly, there is nothing definite about what is included in the term philosophy. Secondly, philosophy and religion have been adversaries and antagonistic to each other which makes the unhappy choice of the title, "Philosophy of Religion" confusing.

Quoting the description of "Philosophy of Religion", given by Pringle-Pattison in the book with the same title, Ambedkar disagrees with him. Pringle-Pattison's definition of Philosophy of Religion is, in fact more apt for "compara-

tive religion", whose aim is to discover the common principle in the varied manifestations of religion.[33] Differing with the sense and aim of Philosophy of Religion as outlined by Pringle-Pattison, Ambedkar sets forth his own interpretation and goals of Philosophy of Religion:

> I am using the word Philosophy in its original sense which was two-fold. It meant teachings, as it did when people spoke of the philosophy of Socrates or the philosophy of Plato. In another sense, it meant critical reason used in passing judgements upon things and events. Proceeding on this basis, Philosophy of Religion is to me not merely descriptive science. I regard it as being both descriptive as well as normative. In so far as it deals with the teachings of a Religion, Philosophy of Religion becomes a descriptive science. In so far as it involves the use of critical reason for passing judgment on those teachings, the Philosophy of Religion becomes a normative science.[34]

Three dimensions are involved in the study of Philosophy of Religion as spelt out by Ambedkar, whose proper definition, ascertainment and examination is necessary for this science. They are:

i) The definition of Religion
ii) "the ideal scheme for which Religion stands"
iii) "and the criterion to be adopted for judging the value of the ideal scheme of divine governance for which a given Religion stands."[35]

These dimensions are discussed in detail in the following sections. Before that it is to be again made clear that, for Ambedkar, Philosophy of Religion is both a descriptive study as well as a normative study judging the value of a particular religion. Each religion promotes a particular "good" and advocates a particular philosophy of life. That is why he states, "I do not think there can be such a thing

as a general Philosophy of Religion. I believe each Religion has its particular philosophy. To me there is no Philosophy of Religion. There is a philosophy of a Religion."[36]

2.4. The Interpretation of "Religion"

2.4.1. Essence of Religion as the Ideal Scheme

In order to avoid unhealthy arguments, Ambedkar proposes that it is a must to have a definition of religion. As there are no agreements about the exact definition, he clarifies the meaning of the term religion as he uses it in his discussion: "I take Religion to mean the propounding of an ideal scheme of divine governance, the aim and object of which is to make the social order in which men live a moral order. This is what I understand by Religion and this is the sense in which I shall be using the term Religion in this discussion."[37]

The social order which a particular religion sanctifies, legitimizes, spiritualizes, promotes and sets up as a sacred ideal which should not be violated, being the norm of the divine governance is the essence, the main purpose of the religion. For Ambedkar, the aim, set of goals or value-system which he calls "the ideal scheme", held up by a particular religion, governs people through its institutions influencing the political structures[38] more powerful than often the Law and the Government of a society.

The divine governance of people through religion is also effected by the control the religious ideals exercise over the minds of the people, who are thus motivated to obey and submit to sacred principles more than the practical secular principles or their instinctual desires. This is why, Ambedkar defines religion in 1936 itself in a brief statement, a short definition of religion that can be found rarely, as *"That which governs people is Religion"*.[39] For the same reason, Ambedkar considers the ascertainment and examination of the ideal scheme of a particular religion,

with which a religion governs, is an important dimension of the Philosophy of Religion.

2.4.2. Various Interpretations in History

"What is Religion?" Ambedkar again raises the question in his *Maqnum Opus, The Buddha and His Dhamma.* Here he describes the popular notion of religion held by common people and advocated by European theologians, who hold Religion as that which connotes "belief in God, belief in soul, worship of God, curing of the erring soul, propitiating God by prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices, etc."[40] He shows that the conception of religion was never fixed. Varying from time to time the word "religion" is an indefinite word with no fixed meaning: "It is a word with many meanings. This is because religion has passed through many stages. The concept has not had the same meaning which it had at the preceding stage or is likely to have at the succeeding stage."[41] Ambedkar gives a short description of the evolution of the concept of religion in the three stages from the primitive to the present form of religion:

> Because most of the phenomena such as lightning, rain and floods, the occurrence of which the primitive man could not explain, any weird performance done to control the phenomenon was called magic. Religion, therefore, came to be identified with magic.
>
> Then came the second stage in the evolution of religion. In this stage religion came to be identified with beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, prayer and sacrifices. But this conception of religion is derivative. The pivotal point in religion starts with the belief that there exists some power which causes these phenomena which primitive man did not know and could not understand. Magic lost its place at this stage. This power was originally malevolent. But later it was felt that it could also be benevolent. Beliefs, rites, ceremonies and sacrifices were necessary both to

> propitiate a benevolent power and also to conciliate an angry power. Later that Power was called God or the Creator.
>
> Then came the third stage that it is this God who created this world and also man. This was followed by the belief that man has a soul and the soul is eternal and is answerable to God for man's actions in the world.[42]

Ambedkar rejects religion to be individualistic worship of God for the salvation of one's soul. As we have seen, his conception of religion is social; it is defined in terms of moral social order and its ideal and principles. Nor is religion that which explains the origin of the world.[43] Ambedkar considers this task to belong to Science not religion. Therefore, for Ambedkar, religion is the principles, values and ideals a society lives by and is governed by, and by which life of both individual and society are preserved, promoted and sanctified.

2.4.3. Means of Knowing the Ideal Scheme

The second dimension of the Philosophy of Religion, namely, "to know the ideal scheme for which a Religion stands" follows logically from Ambedkar's interpretation of religion. But, "to define what is fixed, permanent and dominant part in the religion of any society and to separate its essential characteristics from those which are unessential is often very difficult", confesses Ambedkar.[44] Distinguishing between the *primitive* religions and the *positive* religions, he judges that the task is not so difficult in case of the latter:

> The fundamental characteristic of *positive* Religions is that they have not grown up like primitive religions, under the action of unconscious forces operating silently from age to age, but trace their origin to the teaching of great religious innovators who spoke as the organs of a divine revelation. Being the result of conscious formulations, the philosophy of a religion which is positive is easy to find and easy to state.[45]

Ambedkar holds that Hinduism like Judaism, Christianity and Islam is also mainly a positive religion. Like Christianity that has its Bible, and the other positive religions their own Sacred Books, so does Hinduism too. The Bible of Hinduism is called the *Manu Smrti,* "a divine code which lays down the rules which govern the religious, ritualistic and social life of the Hindus in minute detail."[46] The ideal scheme of divine governance, the social moral order and the principles proposed and sanctified for the same, can easily be ascertained from the sacred codes promulgated and enforced by the Sacred Books of the positive religions which contain the norms of the founders or innovators of particular religions.

2.5. The Criterion to Judge the Ideal Scheme of Religions

"The third dimension in the Philosophy of Religion is the criterion to be adopted for judging the value of the ideal scheme of divine governance for which a given Religion stands. Religion must be put on trial. By what criterion shall it be judged? That leads to the definition of the norm. Of the three dimensions, this third one is the most difficult one to be ascertained and defined."[47] Ambedkar disagrees with those who hold that this dimension is not a part of Philosophy of Religion. Referring to D.S. Adam as an example, he makes it clear,

> Some students of the Philosophy of Religion seem to regard the first two dimensions as all that the field of Philosophy of Religion need include. They do not seem to recognize that a consideration of the third dimension is necessary part of the study of the Philosophy of Religion.... I dissent from this view. The difference is probably due to the fact that I regard Philosophy of Religion as a normative study and as a descriptive study.[48]

2.5.1. Are All Religions Equal?—Need of a Criterion

Throughout the present discussion we need to keep in mind that for Ambedkar religion is not a worship of God by man, a relationship between God and man, nor it is the salvation of soul in the after-life resulting from such relationship. For him, religion is a social institution of morality that sanctifies the proper relationship between the individuals in the society, thus fostering the welfare of the individual and preservation of the society,[49] leading to the Kingdom of Righteousness, egalitarian society and happiness here on earth. This important aspect of Ambedkar's philosophy/theology of religion must be kept in mind during the course of our discussion on criterion to adjudge religions.

Yet, even granting the view that religion is relationship between God and the human beings, it cannot be accepted that "all religions are equal," in the presentation of this goal and the ability to attain the same. Hence we still need a criterion to evaluate religions. Ambedkar strongly disagrees with Gandhi in his assertion that all religions are equal and hence "equal respect" is to be paid to all religions:

> Mr. Gandhi starts out by making a distinction between equal tolerance and equal respect. The phrase "equal respect" is a new phrase. What distinction he wants to make thereby is difficult to recognize. But the new phraseology is not without significance. The old phrase "equal tolerance" indicated the possibility of error. "Equal respect" on the other hands postulates that all religions are equally true and equally valuable. If I have understood him correctly then his premise is utterly fallacious, both logically as well as historically. Assuming the aim of religion is to reach God — which I do not think it is — and religion is the road to reach him, it cannot be said that every road is sure to lead to God. Nor can it be said that every road, though it may ultimately lead to God, is the right road. It may be that (all existing religions are

> false and) the perfect religion is still to be revealed. But the fact is that religions are not all true and therefore the adherents of one faith have a right, indeed a duty, to tell their erring friends what they conceive to be the truth.[50]

This controversy again appears in another essay of Ambedkar titled, "Away from the Hindus", that discusses the reasons for conversion of Dalits and disproves the objections raised against the move.[5] The second objection for conversion, that asserts that conversion is not needed since all religions teach the same truth namely to seek the good, forces him to explicate what is meant by "good", why all religions are not equal and the necessity of criteria to grade the religions. Conceding that all religions may teach to adhere to the "good", they differ in what they propose as good, Ambedkar's perceptive mind observes:

> "Religions may be alike in that they all teach that the meaning of life is to be found in the pursuit of 'good'. But religions are not alike in their answers to the question 'What is good?' In this they certainly differ. One religion holds that brotherhood is good, another caste and untouchability is good.[52]

Also, the means religions propose to achieve the same good can differ. Some religions advocate the method of violence while others absolutize non-violence. This shows that all religions are not the same concludes Ambedkar:

> There is another respect in which all religions are not alike. Besides being an authority which defines what is good, religion is a motive force for the promotion and spread of the 'good'. Are all religions agreed in the means and methods they advocate for the promotion and spread of good?[53]

Philosophy of Religion, as Ambedkar defines it, differs much from the Comparative Religion. The difference lies in the fact that for Comparative Religion all religions are

equally true and good, but not in the field of Ambedkar's Philosophy of Religion. Philosophy of Religion begins where comparative Religion ends he maintains. He accuses Comparative Religions for creating the impression that all religions are equally good and true, and that there is no need of discriminating between them. For Ambedkar, this belief is positively and demonstrably wrong and there is no greater error than this.[54]

Religion is an ambivalent phenomenon; it can be useful or harmful; it can help to foster the good of society or it can bring disaster, it can be liberative or oppressive. A particular religion can be more helpful than others, or a religion can cause more harm compared to the others. It is a fact of experience, and it is to ascertain this fact properly that we need a norm to judge the value of various religions. To dispel the false ideology that all religions are good, and to illustrate that religion can be harmful or helpful, Ambedkar quotes Prof. Tiele's vivid survey[55] of the progress as well as destruction caused by religion, and concludes:

> A force which shows such a strange contrast in its result can be accepted as good without examining the form it takes and the ideal it serves. Everything depends upon what social ideal a given religion, as a divine scheme of governance, holds out. This is a question which is not answered by the science of comparative religion. Indeed it begins where comparative religion ends. The Hindu is merely trying to avoid it by saying that although religions are many they are equally good. For they are not.[56]

In another place Ambedkar is more emphatic in condemning this tenet: "There cannot be a thesis more false than the thesis that all religions are true."[57]

2.5.2. Revolutions in Religion

To ascertain the norm of judging the Philosophy of Religion Ambedkar takes up a historical survey of the ruling concepts

of religion as a scheme of divine governance down the centuries from the ancient society to the modern society. He analyses the important revolutions[58] that raged in religion revolving round the norms for judging what is right and what is wrong. Two important revolutions have occurred in religion. One is an *external* revolution, caused by the scientific revolutions such as the Copernican revolution, and the Darwanian revolution and by the emergence of sciences like Medicine and Psychology which destroyed the empire of religion bit by bit limiting its field and authority.

> It was a revolt of science against the extra territorial jurisdiction assumed by Religion over a field which did not belong. The Internal Revolution was a real Revolution or may be compared to any other political Revolution, such as the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution. It involved a constitutional change. By this Revolution the scheme of divine governance came to be altered, amended and reconstituted.[59]

The *internal* revolution must be paid more attention in order to ascertain the norm for judging the philosophy of religion for it "touches the nature and content of ruling conceptions of the relations of God to man, of society to man and of man to man. How great was this revolution can be seen from the differences which divide savage society from civilized society."[60] Ambedkar taking support from Robertson Smith and Crawley analyses the differences and similarities in the norm between the savage society and the civilized society which he again divides into Antique Society and Modern Society;

> It is therefore clear that savage and civilized societies agree in one respect. In both the central interests of religion — namely in the life processes by which individuals are preserved and the race maintained — are the same. In this there is no real difference between the two.

> But they differ in two other important respects... In civilized society God comes in the scheme of Religion. In civilized society morality becomes sanctified by religion.[61]

In the Savage Society the idea of God is not to be found, its religion is without God and its morality is independent of religion. This change, that has occurred in the Civilized Society, is the first stage in the internal Religious Revolution.

The second stage of Religious Revolution took place within the Civilized Society. By the effect of the contrast that resulted, it split the Civilized Society into Antique Society and Modern Society. This second stage of revolution is far greater than the first, for, it brought about conspicuous differences in the conceptions regarding the relations between God, Society and Man. Ambedkar demonstrates about ten differences in the relationship of God to Man, Society to Man and man to man evident in the Antique society and Modern society quoting extensively from R. Smith. He sums it up saying, "By this Revolution, God has ceased to be merely the protector of society and social interests, in gross, has ceased to be the centre of the divine order. Society and man have changed places as centres of this divine order. It is man who has become the centre of it."[62]

2.5.3. Justice and Social Utility as the Norm

From the analysis of religious revolutions, Ambedkar arrives at the conclusion that individual justice and social utility must serve as the norms for judging the value of the varied ideal schemes of divine governance proposed by different religions. The religion that helps greater promotion of individual justice and equality, and the religion that presents as the divine spiritual religious ideal a moral social order that promotes social utility and progress, that religion should

be judged as the better religion. Ambedkar sums up his historical survey of the norms:

> We began with the distinction between Antique society and Modern society, as has been pointed out, they differed in the type of divine governance they accepted as their Religious ideals. At one end of the Revolution was antique society with its Religious ideal in which the end was Society. At the other end of the Revolution is the modern society with its Religious ideal in which the end is the individual. To put the same fact in terms of the norm it can be said that the norm or the criterion, for judging right and wrong in the Antique Society was *utility* while the norm or the criterion for judging right and wrong in the Modern Society is *justice*. The Religious Revolution was not thus a revolution in the religious organization of Society resulting in the shifting of the centre — from society to the individual — it was a revolution in the norms.[63]

What does Ambedkar mean by justice? Application of the test of justice requires that the concept of justice be properly defined. He does so before he begins to employ it: "I want to explain what I mean by the principle of justice.... If all men are equal, all men are of the same essence and the common essence entitled them to the same fundamental rights and to equal liberty. In short, justice is simply another name for liberty, equality and fraternity."[64]

What is the relationship between liberty, equality and fraternity of which justice consists of? Ambedkar answers:

> Fraternity and liberty are really derivative notions. The basic and fundamental conceptions are equality and respect for human personality. Fraternity and liberty take their roots in these two fundamental conceptions. Digging further down it may be said that equality is the original notion and respect for human personality is a reflexion of it. So that where equality is denied, everything else may be taken to be denied.[65]

Is there an intimate relationship between the two norms of *justice* and *utility* chosen by Ambedkar to judge the religions? He brings out their interrelationship and connection relying on the meaning of justice given by J.S. Mill: "For, as Mill pointed out there is no necessary antagonism between justice and utility. In other words what is unjust to the individual cannot be useful to society."[66]

2.5.4. Other Criteria to Evaluate Religions

Another criterion, which Ambedkar uses to pass judgment regarding a religion, is by ascertaining whether a particular religion is a religion of rules or of principles. According to him, a religion that does not lay stress on the principles and has become only a set of rules has already degenerated. He considers this criterion to judge religions to be important, and so he explains the same with minute details, showing why the religion of principles is better:

> The rule may be right but the act is mechanical. A religious act may not be a correct act but must at least be a responsible act. To permit of this responsibility, Religion must mainly be a matter of principles only, it cannot be a matter of rules. The moment it degenerates into rules it ceases to be Religion, as it kills responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act.[67]

A religion of rules must give way to the religion of principles. A religion like Hinduism which according to him advocates the ancient rules of life must replace them with a religion of principles.[68] The principles that must replace the rules are again the same principles which are derived from justice, one of the norms for judging the religions. They are liberty, equality and fraternity, in short, democracy.[69]

The usefulness of a religion can also be tested by yet another set of criteria of four ways, that Ambedkar has

outlined in his article, "Buddha and the Future of His Religion." B.A.M. Paradkar gives an insightful summary of these criteria in his essay, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar":

> Apart from the classification of religion into Religion of Principles and Religion of Rules, Ambedkar maintained four essential criteria as ways of testing the utility of a religion.
>
> First, a society in order to hold it together must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality. But the part played by law in this respect is very small. It is intended mainly to keep the minority within the range of social discipline. "The majority is left and has to be left to sustain its social life by the postulates and sanction of morality. Religion in the sense of morality must therefore remain the governing principle in every society."
>
> Secondly, Religion, in order to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science. In other words, a reconciliation between science and religion should not be an impossibility.
>
> Thirdly, moral code is not enough for religion, but its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of social life, namely liberty, equality and fraternity.
>
> Finally, religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty. Ambedkar said, 'Renunciation of riches by those who have it may be a blessed state but poverty can never be. To declare poverty to be a blessed state is to pervert religion, to perpetuate vice and crime, to consent to make earth a living hell.'[70]

While discussing the reasons for the conversion of Dalits, Ambedkar goes into the social functions of religion, namely, the preservation of life and the social control which are achieved by religion, by spiritualizing and sanctifying the values of life as ultimate.[71] These social functions can also serve as the criteria to judge the value of a religion. To the

extent a particular religion is able to fulfil the social function of religion to that extent it can be deemed to be good. Ambedkar himself approvingly uses this criterion, when on behalf of the Dalits he questions the utility of Hinduism to them. He asks whether it acknowledges their personal dignity and equality, strives for justice and promotes their social progress. He extends the criterion also to the choice of the new religion to be taken up by the Dalits in their conversion: will it be able to fulfil the social needs of the Dalits?

The Untouchables need three things: "First thing they need is to end their social isolation. The second thing they need is to end their inferiority complex. Will conversion meet their needs?"[72] Again he asks, "Can religion alter this psychology of the Untouchables?... Will conversion raise the general social status of the Untouchables?"[73] These questions also serve as the criteria to judge the value of a religion in the line of Ambedkar's thought.

2.6. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is to be reiterated that this criteria, including the ones enumerated earlier, "rests on a view of religion which is somewhat different from the ordinary view according to which religion is concerned with man's relation to God and all that it means. According to this view, religion exists not for the saving of souls but for the preservation of society and the welfare of the individual".[74] Thus, in Ambedkar's perspective of religion, from the primitive to the present times the vital purpose and function of religion has been the preservation of life, and its promotion, both of the individual as well as of the society in general. In the conser-vation and consecration of life lies the importance and the necessity of religion. And accordingly shall a religion be judged. Personal and social life promotion hinges on

effecting justice and total development .of every individual and every community in a society.

NOTES

1. Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission,* Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1991, p. 478. The first edition was published in 1954, the present reprint is of the third edition of 1991.
2. W. N. Kuber, *B.R. Ambedkar,* New Delhi, Govt. of India, 1978, p. 80.
3. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 421.
4. *Ibid.,* p. 502.
5. Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches,* Bombay, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1987, Vol. 3, pp. 459-460. This set of volumes are referred to as *Writings and Speeches.*
6. *Ibid.,* p. 460.
7. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 459. Emphasis mine.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 259. Italics mine.
9. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 23.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.,* pp. 23-24.
13. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 75.
14. *Ibid.,* p. 76.
15. *Ibid.,* p. 45.
16. *Ibid.,* p. 44.
17. B.R. Ambedkar, *Why Go for Conversion?* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1987, p. 16.
18. *Writings and Speeches,* 1979, Vol. 1, p. 45.
19. *Ibid.,* Vol. 5, p. 407.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.,* p. 409.
22. *Ibid.,* p. 407.
23. *Ibid.,* pp. 408-409.

24. *Ibid.,* p. 407.
25. *Ibid.,* p. 409.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.,* p. 411.
28. *Ibid.,* Vol. 1, pp. 43-44.
29. *Why Go for Conversion?,* p. 15.
30. *Ibid.,* p. 17.
31. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 275.
32. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 3.
33. *Ibid.,* p. 5.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.,* p. 8.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.,* p. 6.
38. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 23-24.
39. *Why Go for Conversion?* p. 16. Emphasis mine.
40. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Bombay, Siddharth Publications, (1957), 1991, p. 226.
41. *Ibid.,* p. 225.
42. *Ibid.,* pp. 225-226.
43. *Ibid.,* p. 231.
44. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 6.
45. *Ibid.,* p. 7.
46. *Ibid.,* p. 8.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 420ff.
50. *Ibid.,* p. 449.
51. *Ibid.,* pp. 403-421.
52. *Ibid.,* p. 405.
53. *Ibid.,* p. 406.
54. *Ibid.;* Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 24.
55. Ambedkar quotes the following perceptive passage of Prof. Tiele: Religion is, "one of the mightiest motors in the history of mankind, which formed as well as tore asunder

nations, united as well as divided empires, which sanctioned the most atrocious and barbarious deeds, the most libinous customs, inspired the most admirable acts of heroism, self renunciation, and devotion, which occasioned the most sanguinary wars, rebellions and persecutions, as well as brought about the freedom, happiness and peace of nations — at one time a partisan of tyranny, at another breaking its chains, now calling into existence and fostering a new and brilliant civilization, then the deadly foe to progress, sciençe and art." –*Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 24.

56. *Ibid.,* Vol. 3, p. 24.
57. B.R. Ambedkar, "The Buddha and the Future of His Religion," *The Mahabodhi,* April-May 1950, p. 203. Cited by B.A.M. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", in T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas, eds., *Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1972, p. 52.
58. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, pp. 9-21.
59. *Ibid.,* p. 21.
60. *Ibid.,* p. 9.
61. *Ibid.,* pp. 11-12.
62. *Ibid.,* p. 21.
63. *Ibid.,* pp. 21-22.
64. *Ibid.,* p. 25.
65. *Ibid.,* p. 66.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 75.
68. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 79.
69. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 77.
70. B.A.M. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", p. 51.
71. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 407-410.
72. *Ibid.,* p. 413.
73. *Ibid.,* p. 418.
74. *Ibid.,* pp. 420-421.

CHAPTER 3

Dalit Liberative Critique

Religion is for man and not man for Religion
*— **Ambedkar***
Sabbath is made for man and not man for Sabbath
*— **Jesus** (Mt. 2.27)*

3.1. Introduction

The liberator of the Dalits, Ambedkar, dedicated his whole life, every moment of it, to the cause of Dalits. Even his religious quest had the same motive behind. The Mahar movement he organized, the labour unions for economic reforms, the political parties that he started, the People's Education Society he founded for the education of Dalits, the legal battles, and the Constitutional reforms that he achieved as the Architect of Indian Constitution, all had the same goal.[1] Added to all these activities, the religious emancipation of Dalits was considered by Ambedkar to be indispensable to achieve liberation of Dalits and their transformation.

This quest gained momentum towards the last phase of his life in 1950s, which is called the religious phase of his life succeeding the political phase which was preceded by the social phase.[2] Yet, Ambedkar's struggle for the liberation of Dalits had begun in 1920s with religious reform. He, with his Mahar movement activists, had tried to enter the Hindu temples forbidden for Dalits, and burnt the *Manu Smriti*, the sacred law book of Hinduism. Finally, the quest for identity and Dalit dignity culminated in their conversion to Buddhism and the total rejection of Hinduism,

and other theistic religions and the ideologies of Gandhism and Marxism.

This chapter deals with religious liberation of Dalits under their champion Ambedkar who offered them reasons to reject all religions and idealogies and choose Buddhism as true and liberative. Nor was Buddhism accepted by Ambedkar in its present forms found in various parts of the world. He had devised a new version, Neo-Buddhism as it is called, with his new interpretation. His re-interpretation of Buddhism, claimed Ambedkar, goes back to the original teachings of Buddha and is uncontaminated by its later alterations.

Beginning with the religious quest of the Mahar Movement, this chapter goes into the discussion of the reasons for its rejection of all religions and ideologies. The main objective of the chapter is to grasp Ambedkar's reinterpretative principles and process, which I have called the "Dalit Liberative Hermeneusis". The "Dalit Critical Principle", is seen in operation in the rejection of religions and ideologies for not sufficiently promoting justice and social utility of the Dalits. Theistic religions, even those that are egalitarian in approach, are still couched in superstition and irrationality. Gandhism has badly let down the Dalits, and Marxism has failed to take the Indian realities of caste and religion seriously, Ambedkar alleges.

3.2. Dalit Quest for Dignity through an Egalitarian Religion

The Mahar Movement, foremost of the Dalit movements in India, that struggled more than any other Untouchable caste to achieve upward mobility, was for long in search of a religion. Eleanor Zelliot in the article "Religion and Legitimation in the Mahar Movement," and in other writings records the struggles put up by this movement and its quest

for an egalitarian religion.[3] The Mahar Conference of 1927, "which is seen by many Mahars as the movement of their mass awakening, was called by Ambedkar after ten years of work through conferences, newspapers and parliamentary action."[4] For, "Its drawing powers and its actions created the numbers and the news which made it a landmark."[5]

This Depressed Classes Conferences led to the breaking of Brahminic laws and restrictions, as seen from the drinking water from the pond of the high caste area at Mahar, prohibited to the untouchables. It also led to the organised forced temple entries by Dalits forbidden for their access notably in the towns of Amravati, Poona and Nasik. "The high point of Second Mahar Conference of 1927 was the ceremonial burning of *Manusmriti,* a gesture re-called with shock by caste Hindus even today".[6] But all this was yet a reformist approach, it was not yet the total rejection of Hinduism.

The threat of conversion, of leaving the fold of Hinduism came as a "thunderbolt", as D. Keer describes it, in 1936 when Ambedkar publicly declared:

> Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindu, we are treated thus. If we were members of another Faith, none would dare treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment. We shall repair our mistake now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power.[7]

In 1936, on May 30-31 in Bombay, a massive Mahar Conference was held to deliberate on the move to leave Hinduism and convert to another religion. Religious leaders from other religions were invited as honoured guests and took their seats at the dias. Ambedkar delivered what is called "the conversion speech" in Marathi, a well argued

and well written speech, a testimony to "the power of Ambedkar's imagery and oratory."[8] The last part of his speech, "Why Conversion?" runs like this, revealing his elocuence and reasoning power:

Religion is for man; man is not for religion.

If you want to gain self-respect, change your religion.
If you want to create a cooperating society,
change your religion.
If you want power, change your religion.
If you want equality, change your religion.
If you want to make the world in which you live happy,
change your religion.

Why should you remain in a religion that does not
value your manhood?
Why should you remain in a religion that does not
let you enter its temples?
Why should you remain in a religion that does not
give you water to drink?
Why should you remain in a religion that bars
you from good jobs?
Why should you remain in a religion that dishonours you
at every step?[9]

This speech of Ambedkar led the Conference to resolve to accept the idea of conversion as essential for the Dalit liberation.

In the same year, in the speech he was to deliver to the Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore, a voluntary organisation which pledged to uplift the Dalits, but "not delivered owing to the cancellation of the Conference by the Reception Committee on the ground that the views expressed in the Speech would be unbearable to the Conference",[10] Ambedkar again reiterated his resolve to convert. He was calling this Hindu revival group of high castes to reform their religion and suggesting the ways to

do so and not only the reasons. He categorically stated, "You must make your effort to uproot caste, if not in my way, then in your way. I am sorry, I will not be with you. I have decided to change. This is not the place to give reasons."[11] But, in "the conversion speech" he refused even to be a well-wisher of Hinduism and suggest means for change helping it to reform: *"To reform the Hindu society is neither our aim nor our field of action. Our aim is to gain freedom. We have nothing to do with anything else."*[12]

Ambedkar is of the opinion that the non-Aryan Dalits, "the broken-men", who eventually came to be treated as Untouchables belonged to Buddhism. "Ambedkar's theory is that the contempt for Buddhism and beef-eating is the root of untouchability. It was his contention that the outcastes in becoming Buddhists were only recovering their original dignity which was beclouded by the 'odious and vicious dogma' of caste and untouchability."[13] Ambedkar held that Dalits, the broken people, who fled from the villages after the tribal wars and came to be excluded from the *chaturvarna* social system of the Vedic Brahmins, and later came to be treated as Untouchables were Buddhists by religion.[14]

Thus, though, in 1935 Ambedkar called for the rejection of Hinduism, and in 1936 Mahar Conference accepted the idea of conversion to another religion it was not as yet decided to which religion the Mahars should defect. There were reactions from Hindu reformers, assuring that Hinduism would be thoroughly reconstructed, and so the Dalits were asked not to leave it.[15] Many religious leaders belonging to Sikhism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity extended invitations to Dalits and their leader Ambedkar to join their fold.[16]

> Ambedkar dallied with the Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Arya Samajists who were interested, for one reason or another, in the possibility of a Mahar conversion to their numbers. He seemed to lean towards Sikhism, and then dropped the whole matter when it became clear that he could not carry the new political privileges of the Untouchables into a new religion. The Mahars, however, never returned to a group movement for Hindu religious rights.[17]

It was only twenty years after the Mahar Conference on Conversion that Ambedkar seemed to have finally decided to embrace Buddhism with the Dalits. But meanwhile he seemed to have leaned more and more towards Buddhism.

Why did he wait for twenty years to join Buddhism? May be he hoped a radical change would take place in Hinduism. It never happened, on the contrary as the years passed by atrocities against Dalits were on the increase. The Independence in 1947, and the passing of Constitution in 1950, only widened the contradictions of equality in principles and inequality in practice. Efforts by Ambedkar in getting the Hindu Code Bill passed, to give Hindus a Uniform Code of Law and equal rights to women, failed and forced him to resign in protest from his post of the Law Minister in 1951. This event, along with the fast deteriorating health condition of his, must have forced him to give a serious thought to convert to Buddhism, without further delay. He sought the right time for doing so, and decided for October 14, 1956, the 2500th year of the Buddhism, the *Vijaya Dashami* Day, on which emperor Ashoka had also embraced Buddhism. On that day in Nagpur 2,50,000 people joined Buddhism receiving Dhamma Diksha from Ambedkar, a ceremony which he himself had designed. Now, there are about three million Neo-Buddhists mainly in Maharashtra and a few in Uttar Pradesh and few other States.[18]

3.3. Ambedkar's Verdict on Religions

3.3.1. Indictment of Hinduism

The norms devised by Ambedkar, as criteria to evaluate the ideal scheme of religions, was mainly to deal a death blow to Hinduism. He was convinced that Hinduism badly needed reform, and wanted to expose the oppression it had unleashed and the slavery it had perpetuated on the Untouchables. He was one of the victims of the social system of Hinduism, and so he should know what Hinduism handed out to the Dalits.

Hinduism, as it is called today, is a bundle of religions and sects. Which of these was Ambedkar attacking? What Hinduism did he condemn and reject? After discussing[19] various meanings of the word 'Hindu' as denoting a religion, parentage, country and a race, Ambedkar points out that he is dealing with a Hinduism in which caste has become essential as doctrine, ideology and sanctified social order. Hinduism that is object of his scathing attack is that Brahminic variety, a Hinduism whose "core is the creed of caste", and where "the *Manu Smriti* must be accepted as the Book of Religion." Ambedkar quotes Max Muller and affirms that his target is, "Modern Hinduism (that) rests on the system of Caste as on a rock which no arguments can shake."[20]

3.3.1.1. An Ideology of Inequality

The verdict Ambedkar serves to Hinduism is that, by idealizing the Brahmin class and caste as "superman" and by degrading the Shudras, Untouchables, Unapproachables and Unseeables as slaves, it has failed to stand the test of the norms of a good religion. That is, Hinduism is not a religion for individual justice with equality, fraternity and liberty and it fails to uphold the social utility of a just, free and moral social order as the ideal scheme of divine

governance. Accusing that Hinduism has failed to uplift the Dalits, Ambedkar arrives at the final judgement of Hinduism:

> The only answer is that Hinduism is overwhelmed with the fear of pollution. It has not got the power to purify. It has not the impulse to serve and that is because by its very nature it is unhuman and unmoral. It is a misnomer to call it religion. Its philosophy is opposed to very thing for which religion stands.[21]

Hinduism is condemned for failing the trial by the first norm of justice. It is found advocating inequality as the infallible doctrine: "This brief analysis of the Philosophy of Hinduism from the point of view of justice reveals in a glaring manner how Hinduism is inimical to equality, antagonistic to liberty and opposed to fraternity.... Indeed inequality is the soul of Hinduism."[22] The second norm of social utility equally fails to save Hinduism from damnation: "If these conclusions are sound, how can a philosophy which disconnects intelligence from labour, which expropriates the rights of man to interests vital to life and which prevented society from mobilizing resources for common action in the hour of danger, be said to satisfy the test of Social Utility."[23]

3.3.1.2. Evils of Caste-System

What exactly did Ambedkar find wrong with the ideal social scheme of divine governance of Hinduism? What are his accusations regarding Hindu social order? What are reasons for judging it to be antagonistic to individual justice and social utility? Given below are some of the passages in which Ambedkar gives a summary of his arguments for his outright condemnation of Hinduism. He finds numerous crime and pervations in the social order of Hinduism based on the caste system:

1) Caste divides Labourers.
2) Caste disassociates work from interest.
3) Caste disconnects intelligence from manual labour.
4) Caste devitalises by denying to him the right to cultivate vital interest and
5) Caste prevents mobilization.

> Caste System is not merely division of labour. IT IS ALSO A DIVISION OF LABOURERS. Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into water-right compartments. Caste System is not merely a division of labourers – which is quite different from division of labour – it is an hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers. There is also a third point of criticism against this view of the Caste System. This division of labour is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes.[24]

Ambedkar accuses Hindu order of rigidity and fixity:

> To sum up, the Hindu social order is an order based on classes and not on individual. It is an order in which classes are graded one above the other. It is an order in which the status and functions of the classes are determined and fixed. The Hindu social order is a rigid order. No matter what changes take place in the relative position of an individual, his social status as a member of the class he is born, in relation to another person belonging to another class, shall in no way be affected. The first shall never become the last. The last shall never become the first.[25]

The evil effects of caste system do not stop with these, they poison the minds of people and result in an ethics and a way of life that is marked with the ideology of inequality, hierarchy, partiality and tribalism, that reduce some to non-

persons, degrade the individuals and groups, and divide the country. Ambedkar in his, *Annihilation of Caste,* decries this situation of decay, and dehumanization. The degradation of morality is yet another evil effect of caste-system. Service to a person and appreciation of merits are not universal in Hindu ethics. They are limited to persons of one's own caste:

> The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound.[26]

"Free social order", an egalitarian, just, and loving society is based on Ambedkar asserts, two fundamental essential tenets:

1) Individual is an end in himself;
2) the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and development of his personality.

Therefore society must be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.[27] But, the Hindu social order has no respect and recognition of the individual person; has no fraternity or equality. It teaches that humans are born unequal from different parts of the Divine body.[28] Isolation and separation of various castes not only brings division in the society, also by the legitimisation of caste-class struggle. Hindu ideology destroys fraternity.[29] Liberty is also lost in Hindu social order due to the restrictions placed on the freedom of speech, occupation and political liberty.[30]

Hindu social order is based on three evil principles of:

1) graded inequality:
2) fixity of class occupations and heredity and

3) fixation of people within their respective classes by isolation and exclusiveness[31]

The special features of Hindu social order are still worse:

a) The worship of the superman, brahmin, glorified like another Aryan Nietzsche's *anti-Christ,*[32]

b) The denial of freedom of opportunity, fixity of one's social status and class by caste system;

c) The divine sanction and the sacred character given to this form of social order as eternal, inviolate and holy. No other religion has gone to this extent Ambedkar adjudges.[33]

3.3.1.3. The Oppression of Dalits

Does Hinduism recognize the dignity and worth of the human being, stand for equality and respect for Dalits? foster fraternity and kinship? preach justice, righteousness, humanness and love, in short, does Hinduism univeralize the value of life without distinction? These are the questions raised by Ambedkar to evaluate the social usefulness of Hinduism to the Untouchables and others as well. What are the answers to this cross-questioning of the eminent barrister?

> No Hindu can dare to give an affirmative answer to any of these questions? On the contrary, the wrongs to which the Untouchables are subjected by the Hindus are acts which are sanctioned by the Hindu religion. They are done in the name of Hinduism and are justified in the name of Hinduism. The spirit and tradition which makes lawful the lawlessness of the Hindus towards the Untouchables is founded and supported by the teachings of Hinduism. How can the Hindus ask the Untouchables accept Hinduism and stay in Hinduism? Why should the Untouchables adhere to Hinduism which is solely responsible for their degradation? How can the Untouchables stay in Hinduism? Untouchability is the lowest depth

> to which the degradation of a human being can be carried. To be poor is bad but not so bad as to be an Untouchable. The poor can be proud. The Untouchable cannot be.... In Hinduism there is no hope for the Untouchables.
>
> But, this is not the only reason why the Untouchables wish to quit Hinduism. There is another reason which makes it imperative for them to quit Hinduism. Untouchability is a part of Hinduism.... Which Untouchable is there with soul so dead as to give such an admission by adhering to Hinduism. That Hinduism is inconsistent with the self-respect and honour of the Untouchables is the strongest ground which justifies the conversion of the Untouchables to another and nobler faith.[34]

3.3.2. The Rejection of Other Religions

After the 1935 Yeola resolution to quit Hinduism, leaders from other religions befriended and invited Ambedkar to join their religions along with his Dalit people. Rumours often sprang that he is about to join one religion or other. He too seemed to have been on the verge of conversion many times, especially to Sikhism and Christianity. But finally he rejected all the existing religions and chose to revive Buddhism. The reasons for rejecting other religions and choosing Buddhism are briefly mentioned below.

3.3.2.1. Islam

Islam was considered by Ambedkar to be very conservative and fundamentalistic. Its unprogressive outlook, degradation of women, lack of education, caste like features and social backwardness made him think of Islam in almost the same line of his verdict on Hinduism. It was lacking the spirit of social service and social reform and reconstruction, and fostering social stagnation. He was also a staunch nationalist and desired a strong, cohesive integrated India undivided

and unfragmented on castes as well as on religious lines. He advocated that Pakistan must be created for the Muslims so that India can live in peace and prosperity. Most important of all, according to him, "The problem for the Depressed Classes was to find a solution along lines which would preserve their national homogeneity with India. While seeking a definable religious identity, they had to strive for national and political unity."[35]

3.3.2.2. Sikhism

Sikhism was more favourable to Ambedkar and he even thought of joining it. What appealed to him was that not only its egalitarian spirit but its strength and valour. He wanted the Dalits to be absorbed into a religious community that is powerful and thus would give them self dignity, *manuski,* a term he repeatedly used. He attended many Sikh functions and religious services. On September 18, 1936, Ambedkar sent to the Sikh Mission in Amritsar thirteen of his men to study Sikhism.[36] While depressed class' conversion would increase Muslim domination in India and spell a danger to the nation, he said joining Sikhism would strengthen India, for, it is a religion of Indian culture unlike Islam or Christianity. His move to join the Sikh fold with his followers was also appreciated by the Hindu leaders. Ambedkar's attraction to Sikhism was also due to the fighting spirit of the Sikhs and their good military record in the army. There was a chance by joining Sikhism, Dalits too would acquire this spirit and would also be recruited in the Indian army. But, "By finally embracing Buddhism instead of Sikhism, Ambedkar and his followers made a decision similar to that of emperor Ashoka, who renounced the way of war and a religion sanctioning a fighting spirit, and adopted instead the path of Buddha's compassion."[37]

3.3.2.3. Jainism

Jainism was not attractive to Ambedkar as he felt it was not a powerful religion. He alleged that the ahimsa propagated by Jainism was unacceptable because it is an extreme form. In his, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* Ambedkar dedicates a section to correct this extreme view of ahimsa and take a middle position.[38]

3.3.2.4. Christianity

Christianity, though a religion that upholds equality, liberty and fraternity, was finally shunned by Ambedkar and his people. The reasons for the rejection of Christianity and its critique by Ambedkar will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. It is sufficient to say here that inspite of all the appreciation he had for it, Ambedkar considered it a foreign and colonial religion. Though, he sought for an Indian religion of Bharatiya culture, he also at times toyed with the idea of joining a religion that would bring outside help to the Dalits to support and strengthen them, as he emphasized in the "Conversion Speech."[39]

It should also be stressed, as explained below, that finally Ambedkar's choice fell on Buddhism because he came to reject all other theistic religions as irrational and superstitious, not only because it belongs to Indian culture. This seems to be reason why he preferred to revive a degenerated and decadent Buddhism, than to join any of the existing religions readily available now in India.

3.3.3. Condemnation of Dubious Religion

3.3.3.1. Exploitation by False Religion

Ambedkar reminds us of great prophets like Buddha, Jesus and his predecessors like Amos, Isaiah who condemned religious practices that exploit the poor and smack of hyprocrisy. "Ambedkar lashes out at wrong concept of

Religion", is the title of the news item that reported his speech to the Sri Sai Baba devotees in 1954.[40] In his inaugural speech of this All-India Sai Devotees Convention he said, "Our religion today has neither God nor morality. I have no doubt that this is a very degenerated state of human mind; and it is a task for the future generation to restore religion in the purer and nobler form."[41] He proceeds to enumerate the stages of its degeneration:

> He added that in his day in India there was no religion except the worship of idols, whether they were of Sadhus, saints, or miracle-makers. He said that in its original form religion was a matter of personal salvation of man's soul,
>
> and in its second stage it meant the maintenance of human brotherhood based on moral rules governing the conduct of human beings towards each other.
>
> In its third stage, men worshipped those personalities who satisfied the wants of their lives;
>
> and in its last stage they worshipped a person who performed miracles.
>
> The money collected in the name of saints should be utilized, he concluded, for hospitals, education, establishment of small-scale industries for the helpless, and the widows. At the outset he declared that he was not a follower of Sai Baba; nor had he any opportunity of meeting him.[42]

Ambedkar denounced the exploitation by religion of people's minds and their wealth for the sake of clergy and saints. "He said that there was so much poverty and misery in the world that it was criminal to collect money in the name of religion and then waste it on *Sadhus* and saints."[43]

3.3.3.2. Morality as Essence of True Religion

The final rejection of all religions and "religion" as such, as understood in the theistic sense, took place when Ambedkar

chose the non-theistic Buddhist *Dhamma* as the true religion. In the "Bible that he wrote for the Neo-Buddhism titled, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* he denounces "religion" and contrasts it with the *Dhamma* of Buddha which is not considered a "religion" at all by European theologians. Here by religion he means a theistic religion: "This is what Religion has come to be and this what it connotes — belief in God, belief in soul, worship of God, curing of the erring soul, propitiating God by prayers, ceremonies, sacrifices, etc."[44] Stating that *Pradanya* and *Karuna* are the corner stones of Buddha's Dhamma,[45] he shows the subject matter of Religion and the subject matter of *Dhamma:* "The two are poles apart. The purpose of Religion is to explain the origin of the world. The purpose of *Dhamma* is to reconstruct the world."[46]

Dhamma is equated with morality by Ambedkar. He regrets that in religion morality is not given prominence nor is it effective. He also points out the difference in the basis of morality in both:

> What is the place of morality in Dhamma? The simple answer is Morality is Dhamma and Dhamma is Morality. In other words, in Dhamma morality takes the place of God although there is no God in Dhamma. In Dhamma there is no place for prayers, pilgrimages, rituals, ceremonies or sacrifices. Morality is the essence of Dhamma. Without it there is no Dhamma. Morality in Dhamma arises from the direct necessity for man to love man. It does not require the sanction of God. It is not to please God that man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love man.[47]

3.3.3.3. Theistic Religion Dismissed

Besides the centrality and sanctity of morality, another difference between theistic religions and Buddhist *Dhamma* is the rejection of "God", "Soul", "heaven", and "after life."

It holds that the existence of a God, a self-existent being, as the cause of the universe cannot be proved, according to Buddhist epistemology at least. Ambedkar presents its arguments based on its law of causation:

> The Blessed Lord responding to his wishes raised the question: "Who is it that shapes our lives? Is it Ishvara, a personal creator? If Ishvara be the maker, all living things should have silently to submit to their maker's power. They would be like vessels formed by the potter's hand. If the world had been made by Ishvara there should be no such thing as sorrow, or calamity, or sin; for not, there would be another cause besides him, and he would not be the self-existent one. Thus, you see, the thought of Ishvara is overthrown.[48]

Similarly "soul" cannot exist by itself, before, during or after bodily existence, as it is not a self-existent being but only a mis-representation of the stream of consciousness.[49] Happiness is to be found on this earth itself in and through morality, virtue, wisdom, love and justice. Kingdom of Righteousness is to be realized here on earth in and through *dhamma* as the result of our good deeds and not by "religion" which is "worship of God for salvation of the soul." Ambedkar criticizes the doctrine of "soul" and *"atman":*

> The Buddha said that religion based on soul is based on speculation. Nobody has seen the soul or has conversed with the soul. The soul is unknown and unseen. The thing that exists is not the soul but the mind. Mind is different from the soul. Belief in soul he said is unprofitable. A religion based on soul is therefore not worth having. It only ends in creating superstition... Did the Buddha believe in the soul? No. He did not. His doctrine about the soul is called *An-atta,* no soul.[50]

Mention is to be also made to the comparison Ambedkar repeatedly makes between the Buddha who claimed himself to be only *marga data,* bestower of the way, not *moksha*

data, bestower of heaven as others, like Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammed, had claimed to be. These religious founders, including Moses, have also claimed to be "Messengers of God" having received special God's revelation to be passed on to others. But, Buddha realized his wisdom and what he taught through *dhyana* and obtained them in his moment of enlightenment and not through any supernatural means or revelation but by logical reasoning and "universal human experience of life in the world."[51]

Hence, only this "religion" of *Dhamma,* in Ambedkar's understanding, fulfils all norms of criteria that he has set for a religion to be good, true and valuable. It bases itself on individual justice and social utility. It is not a religion of rules as theistic religions are[52] but is a religion based on the principles of equality, fraternity and liberty.[53] *Dhamma* is rational and scientific. It does not sanction poverty and idealise it; rather tries to abolish the same.[54] The theistic religions failed, in the estimate of Ambedkar, to fulfil all the norms, though they may satisfy some of them; above all they are superstitious and irrational in their key doctrines.

3.4. Dalit Critique of Ideologies

3.4.1. Damnation of Gandhism

3.4.1.1. Gandhi's Support of Caste-system

Ambedkar quotes Gandhi's writings extensively to present in his own words the real tenets of Gandhism, which is different from the imaginary one cooked up by the Gandhian enthusiasts. In his social philosophy Gandhi upholds the *Varnavyvastha,* the caste system as understood on the lines of hereditary occupation and the division based on labour, as a sound and "natural order of the society." *Varna* according to Gandhi means occupational division of people fixed at birth based on the occupation of family in which one is born. Gandhi advocates the *varna* system: "The object of

the *varna* system is to prevent competition and class struggle and class war. I believe in the *varna* system because it fixes the duties and occupations of persons."[55]

Though, later in 1945, Gandhi stated that caste is an anachronism and that he was not in favour of it, even then, "Gandhi does not say that he is against the *Varna* system. And what is Mr. Gandhi's *Varna* system? It is simply a new name for the caste system and retains all the worst features of the caste system."[56] Though Gandhi was a staunch campaigner for removing untouchability, he did not object to purification after pollution by contact with the Untouchables. Worse, he was not in favour of inter-dining or intermarriage between the Hindus and the Untouchables which would promote social assimilation of the "Harijans".[57]

3.4.1.2. Criticism of Gandhian Economics

The economics of Gandhism supports the *chakra* approach and condemns the machinery. It supports *trusteeship* and condemns class struggle. Ambedkar severely criticises these approaches as "primitive" and "hopelessly fallacious". Admitting that the machinery and modern civilization have produced many evils, he argues, "If machinery and civilization have not benefited everybody the remedy is not to condemn machinery and civilization but alter the organization of society, so that the benefits will not be usurped by the few but will accrue to all."[58] Similarly, Ambedkar considers the concept of trusteeship to be too simplistic and fantastic: "The idea of *trusteeship* which Gandhism proposes as a panacea by which the moneyed classes will hold their properties in trust for the poor is the most ridiculous part of it."[59] Not to have known, that the propertied classes cannot withstand the temptation of misuse of power they exercise on the servile classes with one of moral rearmament, is too silly.[60]

Gandhi seemed to have been often unsupportive of the rights of working and toiling classes. In 1921, he had instructed the *Kisan* tenents who had risen against the Zamindari landlords, "While we will not hesitate to advise the Kisans when the moment comes, to suspend payment of taxes to government, it is not contemplated that at any stage of non-cooperation we could seek to deprive the Zamindars of their rent."[61] He seemed to have been opposed to any change in the status-quo, especially in the matters of traditional relationships prevailing between tenents and landlords, employers and employees. He held on to the view that truth will triumph automatically, if not immediately in the future, till then those who suffer injustice must bear up and not resort to militant or violent means to gain their rights or achieve social justice.[62] "For Gandhism is in no sense a revolutionary creed. It is conservative in excelsis."[63]

Ambedkar judges that, "Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time, it seeks to maintain intact a social structure which permits the domination of one class by another on a hereditary basis, which means a perpetual domination of one class by another."[64] Ambedkar describes two revealing features of Gandhism to which so far less attention has been paid:

> The first special feature of Gandhism is that its philosophy helps those who have, to keep what they have and to prevent those who have not from getting what they have a right to get. No one who examines the Gandhian attitude to strikes, the Gandhian reverence for Caste and the Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship by the rich for the benefit of the poor can deny that this is upshot of Gandhism. Whether this is the calculated result of a deliberate design or whether it is a matter of accident may be open to argument. But the fact remains that

> Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-to-do and the leisure class.
>
> The second special feature of Gandhism is to delude people into accepting their misfortunes by presenting them as best of good fortunes...[65]

3.4.1.3. "The Doom of the Untouchables"

No doubt, M.K. Gandhi transformed the Indian National Congress from 1920 onwards into an organisation of masses, and gave it also the orientation of social reform and social service. He showed much concern for the *Harijans,*[66] as he addressed the Dalits, that he specially designed a programme for their uplift and started a special fund and organisation called *Harijan Sevak Sangh.* He held untouchability a sin that is unjustified according to Hindu Scriptures and strove to abolish it. Gandhi supported the temple-entry movements by the Dalits in some places though late. But, his lack of proper understanding of the social organisation, and his love of pacificity and peace without conflicts and polarization, coloured by his own class-caste blind, made him strongly oppose, and at times "resist (it) with (my) life",[67] the real and radical solutions for the evil of caste-system.

Gandhi fasted against the communal award granting separate electorates for Dalits in 1932. He supported the caste-system as a time tested and good way of organising the society on occupational lines. He also objected to the conversion of Dalits to other religions and castigated the missionaries for encouraging their conversion. Above all he failed to support the agitation of the Dalits and the poor for just wages and land reforms.

Even the little that Gandhi, his Congress Party and *Sevak Sangh* did, seem to have done in response of Ambedkar's continuous allegations against them for neglecting the Dalits. Ambedkar levels fourteen charges against Gandhi and Con-

gress[68] mentioning instances in which they either neglected the Dalits or failed to act in support of them. Ambedkar accuses Gandhi of inconsistencies and half-hearted service to the Dalits. His *Harijan Sevak Sangh* was not made strong and it always lacked funds. Gandhi did not include Dalits in its administrative board, instead this *Sangh* treated them as beggars.

Gandhi never once fasted nor used his weapon of *satyagrha* in support of the cause of Dalits. Instead, he deprived the benefit of Communal Award for the Dalits with his fast and refused to support the *satyagrahas* of Dalits for their demands. He did not recommend Dalits to be included in the Congress cabinet. The Committee set up by the Congress Party in 1922 for the upliftment of the Untouchables languished for funds and finally was dissolved with no protest from Gandhi!

Ambedkar's disgust and "disillusionment with the Congress under Gandhi led the Scheduled Classes under his leadership to reject the Indian National Congress and its ideology. They found it too dominated by Caste Hindus and not sufficiently impregnated with the spirit of a democratic social order."[69]

The critical principle of Ambedkar's hermeneusis is whether the subject under discussion helps the emancipation of Dalits or not. After he has applied this criterion to judge Gandhi and the Congress party, he declares his final verdict on Gandhism, "the doom of the Untouchables":[70]

> What hope can Gandhism offer to the Untouchables? To the Untouchables Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors. The sanctity and infallibility of the Vedas, Smritis and Shastras, the iron law of caste, the heartless law of karma and the senseless law of status by birth are to the Untouchables veritable instruments of torture which Hinduism has forged against the Untouchables. These very instruments which have mutilated, blasted and

> blighted the life of the Untouchables are to be found intact and untarnished in the bosom of Gandhism. How can the Untouchables say that Gandhism is a heaven and not a chamber of horrors as Hinduism has been? The only reaction and a very natural reaction of the Untouchables would be to run away from Gandhism.[71]

3.4.2. The Failure of Marxism

3.4.2.1. Unsuitable Imported Ideology

Marxism, and its Indian form as Communism, did not appeal to Ambedkar, who was a firm believer in liberal democracy and parliamentary constitutional form of government. He was more influenced by Liberal Humanism than Marxian Socialism, though the latter too had its own contribution to make to his political and economic thought and even to his religious *Dhamma*. The various convictions of his Humanism and the reasons for the disappointment with Communism are listed by D.R. Jatava:[72] recognition of the practical force of nationalism; crusade for social, economic and political freedom in terms of liberty, equality and fraternity; a dislike of any type of imperialism, political, social, economic or religious; a commitment to constitutional methods as the only way; a detestation of violence and a love of justice and peace; and a bias for democratic dynamism.

Ambedkar's is a social humanism, "which sees man as the maker of civilisation and culture and as having the potentiality to rise on the basis of love and knowledge."[73] So, Ambedkar's rejection of the ideology of Communism was based on "his deep regard for parliamentary institutions and democratic procedures and his hatred of violence. As an economist he had also reservations about the labour theory of value. Further, Ambedkar was always of the view that social and human reconstruction needed a religious basis."[74]

Ambedkar also realized that Communists and Socialists neglected many important factors of Indian reality. They avoided the rural agricultural labour and concerned them-

selves mostly with the urban proletariate. They failed to take caste into their analysis of Indian society. Thus they tried to import Western ideology unsuited for Indian culture and even with it they remained only at the "phrase" level.[75] Ambedkar warned them prophetically:

> That, the social order prevalent in India is a matter which a Socialist must deal with, that unless he does so he cannot achieve his revolution and that if he does achieve it as a result of good fortune he will have to grapple with it if he wishes to realize his ideal, is a proposition which in my opinion is in controvertible. He will be compelled to take account of caste after revolution. This is only another way of saying that, turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you will meet this monster.[76]

3.4.2.2. The Buddha or Karl Marx?

The essay, "Buddha or Karl Marx", of Ambedkar makes a comparison of the means used by Buddha and Marx to attain Communism. He starts with the statement of the creeds of Buddha and Marx. His assessment of Marxism is summed up as follows:

> Apart from this general falsification of the Marxian thesis that Socialism is inevitable, many of the other propositions stated in the lists have also been demolished both by logic as well as by experience. Nobody now accepts the economic interpretation of history as the only explanation of history. Nobody accepts that the proletariat has been progressively pauperised. And the same is true about his other premises.[77]

Is there not any good left in Marxism? Ambedkar replies,

> What remains of the Karl Marx is a residue of fire, small but still very important. The residue in my view consists of four items:

> i) The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world.
>
> ii) That there is a conflict of interest between class and class.
>
> iii) That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation.
>
> iv) That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property".[78]

These four points are accepted by Ambedkar as "still very important". Ambedkar shows from the Buddha's dialogues and *Sangha* rules, that not only the Buddha is in agreement with Karl Marx but better than him on the four points mentioned above:

> On the point one there is complete agreement between the Buddha and Karl Marx.
>
> On the second point ... as to the Buddha's own attitude towards class conflict, his doctrine of *Astanga marga* recognizes that class conflict exists and that it is the class conflict which is the cause of misery;
>
> On the third question... The language is different but the meaning is the same. If for misery one reads exploitation Buddha is not away from Marx...[79]
>
> On the fourth point, no evidence is necessary. The rules of the Bhikku Sangh will serve as best testimony on the subject... These rules are far more rigourous that are to be found in Communism in Russia.[80]

Besides, the goal of Buddha as well as of Marx, according to Ambedkar, is the same, namely "to bring about Communism". The Buddha bequeathed the doctrine of *Pancha Sila,* Noble Eight-fold Path, *Ten Asavas,* Fetters or Hindrances, and the *Paramitas,* the practice of ten virtues and stages, as means to achieve Communism while Marx advo-

cated an entirely different type of means. Ambedkar lists and compares the means adopted by the Buddha and Marx: "It is clear that the means adopted by the Buddha were to convert a man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily. The means adopted by the Communists are equally clear, short and swift. They are (1) Violence and (2) Dictatorship of the Proletariat."[81]

After the succinct exposition of the creeds of the Buddha and Karl marx and the comparison between them, Ambedkar concludes, "It is now clear what are the similarities and differences between Buddha and Karl Marx. The differences are about the means. The end is common to both."[82] Ambedkar is convinced that the Buddha's means was "superior and lasting in the long run" and so valuable. The Buddha was opposed to both violence and dictatorship:

> The Buddha was against violence. But he was also in favour of justice and where justice required he permitted the use of force... Buddha's Ahimsa was not as absolute as the Ahimsa preached by Mahavira, the founder of Jainism. He would have allowed force only as energy. The Communists preach himsa as an absolute principle. To this the Buddha was deadly opposed. As to dictatorship, the Buddha would have none of it. He was born a democrat and he died a democrat.[83]

The Buddha was an egalitarian and his *Bhikku Sangh* was the most democratic institution. Communists destroyed private property and killed many people in order to achieve equality thus sacrificing many other valuables.[84]

Dictatorship form of government, as different from the parliamentary government, where one's duty is to obey with no right to criticize, destroys liberty. Government by moral disposition is better than government by force. "What the Buddha wanted was that each man should be morally trained that he may himself become a sentinel for the kingdom of

righteousness."[85] Ambedkar repeatedly insists that, to guarantee one valuable Communists destroy many other valuable ends:

> We welcome the Russian Revolution because it aims to produce equality. But it cannot be too much emphasized that in producing equality, society cannot afford to sacrifice fraternity or liberty. Equality will be of no value without fraternity or liberty. It seems that the three can co-exist only if one follows the way of the Buddha. Communism can give one but not all.[86]

3.4.2.3. The Neglect of Religion

Pleased to note that "The Communists themselves admit that their theory of the State as a permanent dictatoship is a weakness in their philosophy", Ambedkar hastened to question the result of "withering away of the State": "They take shelter under the plea that the State will ultimately wither away. They are two questions which they have to answer. When will it wither away? What will take the place of the State when it withers away?"[87] If good can result, as in the case of Ashoka, dictatorship can be tolerated for a short while, deems Ambedkar. But, he is worried what will take the place of State, once the dictatorship is terminated.

For, the Communists have no moral force of religion at their disposal to hold the society together. Any other force can result in anarchy totally demolishing all the work of Communists. Hence, Ambedkar reminds them of the indispensability of religion to hold the society together, "The only thing which could sustain it after force is withdrawn is Religion. But to the Communists Religion is anathema. Their hatred to Religion is so deep seated that they will not even discriminate between religions which are helpful to Communism and religions which are not."[88]

"The Communists have carried their hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the differ-

ence between the two,"[89] Ambedkar regrets. Quoting the sermons of the Buddha, Ambedkar proves that two charges levelled against Christianity, that it is other-worldly and that it is an opium that makes the poor weak by promising heaven and allowing them to suffer in this world, cannot be levelled against Buddhism which teaches to acquire wealth and promises happiness in this world.[90] To the Socialists who base their interpretation of history and reality on economics and neglect religion as source of power and social status, Ambedkar gives a clear demonstration of the same, placing before them many facts from India to prove his assertion.[91]

In India, religious figures such as Mahatmas and Saddhus hold sway over the masses and the millionaires. The paupers sell even their little property to go on pilgrimages to Benares and Mecca. Priests are held in greater respect than magistrates. Elections take on religious twists. Thus political situation has many consequences due to religious situations and religious revolutions have preceded political revolutions in history. Ambedkar provides an historical survey to prove this point to Marxian Socialists.[92]

Yet, one should not conclude that he was totally against Karl Marx who according to him has "very important points" to contribute as was shown earlier. It is to be noted that Ambedkar accepted the theory of class-caste struggle as an important insight of Marx. Following the line of the Communists and the Socialists, he advocated State Socialism with mixed economy as essential for India and tried to make it Constitutional and mandatory. He also reinterprets Neo-Buddhism with Marxian theories.

3.5. Conclusion

The Dalit Liberative Hermeneusis of Ambedkar begins with the suspicion and critique of the Hindu ideology of inequality

which enslaves the Dalits. Freedom from this slavery can be achieved by the total rejection of Hinduism concludes the Mahar movement led by Ambedkar in 1935. Their quest for identity, self-respect, and human dignity takes on a long search of about twenty years. The Dalit Critical Principle was employed along with the other criteria formulated by Ambedkar to judge the ideal scheme of religions.

The religions, like Sikhism and Christianity, that are egalitarian in approach, promote justice and social development, and do not idealize poverty but advocate liberty, equality, fraternity as their ideal scheme of divine governance were quite attractive. But they fail to stand the test of rationalism and so are deemed to be speculative and superstitious. Nor were the prevalent ideologies found to be effective to liberate the Dalits. Gandhism in Ambedkar's analysis was judged to be nothing else but another form of Hinduism. So it only spells doom for the Dalits. Marxism, the important ideology, is also unsuitable to emancipate Dalits as it does not take into account the powerful Indian realities that exercise great influence over the people of India, namely, culture, caste and religion. Its violent model of revolution sacrifices many democratic values, and worst, many precious lives. The long sought after answer is found in the Buddhist model of revolution, which is better suited for Indian situation to achieve Dalit liberation.

NOTES

1. For an understanding of Ambedkar's liberative struggles for Dalit cause, see, G.S. Lokhande, *Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar,– a Study in Social Democracy,* New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1977, pp. 127-237; A.M. Rajasekhariah, *B.R. Ambedkar, The Politics of Emancipation,* Bombay, Sindhu Publications, 1971; G. Omvedt, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution;* E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit;* and J. Gokhale, *From Concessions to Confrontation.*

2. Cf. Dr. D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* Agra, Phoenix Publishing House, 1965, pp. 26-32.
3. Eleanor Zelliot, "Religion and Legitimation in the Mahar Movement", in Bradwell L. Smith, ed., *Religion and Legitimation of Power in South Asia,* Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1978, pp. 83-105; see her latest book, *From Untouchable to Dalit.*
4. *Ibid.,* p. 88.
5. *Ibid.,* p. 93.
6. *Ibid.,* p. 94.
7. *Ibid.,* p. 95.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.,* p. 102.
10. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 36.
11. *Ibid.,* p. 78.
12. *Why Go for Conversion?* p. 18. Italics original.
13. B.A.M. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", p. 63.
14. E. Zelliot, "Religion and Legitimation in the Mahar Movement", p. 98.
15. *Ibid.,* p. 96.
16. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 276.
17. E. Zelliot, "Religion and Legitimation...", p. 96.
18. Cf. B.A.M. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", p. 66.
19. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, pp. 335-336.
20. *Ibid.,* p. 336; Ambedkar has many writings that condemn Brahminic Hinduism and its theology. In this section we pay attention only to its caste ideology. For Ambedkar's criticism of other aspects of Brahminic theology, see, *Writings and Speeches,* 1987, Vol. 4, pp. 5-8, and the whole volume which contains Ambedkar's most controversial work, *Riddles in Hinduism;* see also, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, which contains, *Philosophy of Hinduism,* and *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India.* Most of the works contained in Vol. 3 and 4. Ambedkar wrote after 1951. For

a proper understanding of his main work, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* which was being written at the same time, Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 488.

21. *Ibid.,* p. 92.
22. *Ibid.,* p. 66.
23. *Ibid.,* p. 71.
24. *Ibid.,* p. 67.
25. *Ibid.,* p. 115.
26. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, pp. 56-57.
27. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, pp. 95-99.
28. *Ibid.,* p. 100.
29. *Ibid.,* pp. 102-105.
30. *Ibid.,* pp. 114-115.
31. *Ibid.,* pp. 113-114.
32. *Ibid.,* pp. 116-124.
33. *Ibid.,* pp. 125-129.
34. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 412.
35. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", p. 53.
36. *Ibid.,* p. 57.
37. *Ibid.,* p. 58.
38. Cf. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 249-251.
39. *Why Go for Conversion?* p. 16.
40. B.G. Kunte and B.N. Phatak, eds., *Source Material on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and The Movement of Untouchables,* Bombay, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1982, Vol. 1, p. 417.
41. Dr. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 452.
42. *Ibid.,* pp. 452-453.
43. See note 40 above.
44. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 226.
45. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 227.
46. *Ibid.,* pp. 230-231.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 231.
48. *Ibid.,* p. 102.
49. *Ibid.,* p. 186.

50. *Ibid.,* pp. 182-183.
51. *Ibid.,* p. 157.
52. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 251.
53. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 215-221.
54. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 424.
55. Quoted by B.R. Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* 1990, Vol. 9, p. 278. This volume contains two books of Ambedkar on Gandhism: (1) *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables,* a reprint of the first edition of 1945, pp. 1-387. The revised version of chapter IX found in the second edition of 1946 is included as the annexure to the volume, pp. 439-489; (2) *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables,* a reprint of the first edition of 1943, pp. 388-433.
56. *Ibid.,* p. 297. See also, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, pp. 92-94.
57. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 276 and 296.
58. *Ibid.,* p. 283.
59. *Ibid.,* p. 286.
60. Cf. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.,* p. 231.
62. *Ibid.,* pp. 279-282.
63. *Ibid.,* p. 290.
64. *Ibid.,* p. 291.
65. *Ibid.*
66. This term "Harijan" is slowly going out of use. Not only the Dalits, even the politicians and the press now avoid it. Ambedkar himself never used it.
67. Cf. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 205. Gandhi feared that giving the status of separate community and separate electorate and reservations for Dalits would divide the Hinduism in every village and so he asserted in the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference's ninth sitting, on October 8, 1931: "... therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist

this thing I would resist it with my life." See, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 2, 1982, p. 663.

68. See. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 9, pp. 251-254.
69. B.A.M. Paradkar. "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar," pp. 45-46.
70. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 9, p. 274.
71. *Ibid.,* pp. 296-297.
72. Paradkar. "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", p. 47; see D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* Agra, Phoenix Pub. House, 1965, pp. 261-269.
73. *Ibid.*
74. *Ibid.*
75. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 47.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.,* Vol. 3, p. 444.
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.,* pp. 444-445.
80. *Ibid.,* p. 447.
81. *Ibid.,* p. 450.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Ibid.*
84. See, *Ibid.,* p. 452.
85. *Ibid.,* p. 459.
86. *Ibid.,* p. 462.
87. *Ibid.,* p. 459.
88. *Ibid.,* p. 460.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Cf. *Ibid.*
91. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 44.
92. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 33-44.

CHAPTER 4

Dalit Challenge to Christianity

They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick.
*— **Jesus** (Mt. 9.12) quoted by Ambedkar*

4.1. Introduction

The Dalits have been attracted to the Christian religion and joined it in millions. They form the majority in Indian Christianity, yet, have very little decision making power in their hands, as the leadership and positions in the Christian Churches are still in the hands of the minority groups converted from other "high" castes. So, this separate chapter on Christianity in India is much needed to deal with their condition. It is also important since the majority of the Christians are Dalits and what affects the Churches affects them most either for good or bad. Affirming this, Ambedkar takes up the discussion on Indian Christianity in many of his essays.

Ambedkar is deeply concerned with the growth and welfare of Christianity in India, as more and more Dalits are still attracted to it. Disappointed that Christian Churches have failed to follow the way of Jesus, he admonishes them to correct themselves. As a true friend who confides the truth even if it is bitter, Ambedkar castigates the Christian Churches for wasting their resources to serve the rich high caste Hindus neglecting their own Dalit Christians. He offers many suggestions to Indian Christianity to become strong and powerful. Diagnosing the causes for the ailments that pester Christianity, he also offers prescription for cure and speedy recovery.

This chapter begins with Ambedkar's appreciation of Christianity. The egalitarian doctrine of Christianity, its special care for the weak and the lowly, and its generous services and charitable works receive high praises from Ambedkar. But soon follows Ambedkar's indictment of Christianity. He again utilizes his measuring rod of the Dalit critical principle to judge Christianity and its works in India. Are the health and educational services run by the Churches beneficial to the Dalits? Why does the discrimination of Dalits continue in the Churches? Why Christianity is unable to raise their social status? remove their inferiority and make them bold and powerful to launch revolutionary movements to liberate themselves and struggle for social justice? Such questions are raised and answered by Ambedkar in his critique of Christianity. Finally, the chapter lists the suggestions offered by him for the growth and strength of Indian Christianity so that it can, though a minority, become powerful politically.

4.2. Ambedkar's Appreciation of Christianity

4.2.1. Hope to the Down-trodden—Ambedkar on Jesus

"Buddhism as does Christianity affords hope to the down-trodden", Ambedkar acknowledged on 14th October, 1956 on the event of the great mass conversion of the Dalits in a long speech in Nagpur during a public Deeksha ceremony function.[1] As early as 1938 he had held the same view while he was in quest of a religion for himself and for the Dalits.[2] It is inspiring to note that his esteem for Jesus remained the same even after he had accepted the Buddha as his guru definitely in his Deeksha.

Ambedkar often places Jesus Christ and the Buddha along side each other, as many Indian intellectuals do,[3] and compares their lives and points out similarities. The Buddha and Jesus both spent their time in long hours of prayer,

in preaching to the disciples and associating with the sinners and publicans and showing compassion to them.[4] He had categorically stated in 1938 that only two personalities, namely the Buddha and Jesus, captivated him: "The next day (January 5, 1938) Amebdkar made another important speech in Sholapur. The local Christians were eager to hear his views on religion. So he addressed a meeting of the Christians under the presidentship of the Rev. Gangadhar Jadhav. He said ... from his study of comparative religion he could say that two personalities could captivate him. They were the Buddha and Christ."[5]

Jesus' solidarity with the lowly was the main reason for Ambedkar's admiration and reverence for Jesus. He castigates the missionaries for leaving aside this example and approach of Jesus, which he considered very important, and trying to impress Indians with Jesus' miracles, who know of more wonder miracles performed by Krishna and Rama:[6] "As events in India have shown this was a wrong approach. It was certainly just the opposite to the one adopted by Jesus and his disciples. Gibbon has given a description of the growth of Christianity in Rome which shows from what end Christ and his disciples began."[7] Then Ambedkar gives a long quote, running almost to three pages, from Gibbon to prove that early Christianity comprised mostly of faithful from lower ranks of society in Rome.[8]

Jesus, for Ambedkar, was "physician to the Untouchables", unlike M.K. Gandhi who is wrongly compared with the Jesus. Ambedkar is indignant at those who do so. The contrast between them is great he points out. Gandhi was sympathetic to the rich, to those who sinned against the lowly. But, "When Jesus was taunted by the Pharisees he retorted by saying — "They that are whole have no need of the physicians but they that are sick". How sharp is the contrast between this attitude of Jesus and that of Mr. Gandhi.

Jesus did not worry about those who were 'whole'."[9]

"Ambedkar, a devoted student of the Bible, who possessed a huge collection of Biblical literature, was led to compare himself to Moses. And aptly so," records D. Keer, his biographer.[10] Ambedkar was conscious of the fact that Jesus was the liberator of the poor and low castes, and that Christianity belonged to the lower classes and was quite attractive to them.[11] He was "aware of the Christian contribution to the humanization of western society and its cohesive influence on western culture."[12] Ambedkar hoped that Christianity could be a viable solution for healing the social divisions in India. He was on the verge of becoming a Christian during the friendship he cherished with Bishop Pickett of Bombay and the Christian missionaries and ministers. He held dialogues with them often. "During those years Ambedkar believed that the teachings of Christ and the liberation message of St. Paul proved a 'perfect antidote to the poison Hinduism has injected into our souls and a dynamite strong enough to lift us out of our present degraded position'".[13]

> During this period, says Bishop Pickett, 'occasionally he (Ambedkar) seemed on the verge of declaring himself a Christian and advising his people to become Christians'. Twice he inquired whether the Bishop would be 'willing to baptise him secretly on the understanding that within few years he would make confession of his faith'. He wanted secrecy because he wished to remain eligible to represent his people in the Assembly. Sometimes during those years, he seemed to have thought of marrying a Christian, 'but he never did. Instead he married a Brahmin.'[14]

4.2.2. A Religion of Equality and Fraternity

With firm belief that Christianity is a religion that fosters just and egalitarian society and is a guardian of liberty,

equality and fraternity, Ambedkar claimed to be "friend of Christians". He firmly defended it even against M.K. Gandhi.[15] He told the Christians at Sholapur, as quoted above, that he wanted such a religion as Christianity that builds up proper relationship between the humans based on liberty, equality and fraternity. While explaining the "Free Social Order" based on the these three principles, Ambedkar uses quotations from the Bible to clarify them and prove their necessity.

To prove that free social order stands on the foundation of the fundamental tenet, that an individual is an end in himself with inalienable rights and distinctive moral responsibility, he draws support from the book of Ezekiel: "Behold! all souls are mine; as the soul of the Father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die ... the son shall not bear the iniquity of the Father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked upon him."[16] He also quotes from a noted Christian philosopher, Jacques Maritain, to demonstrate the sacredness and value of the dignity, rights and equality of every individual; whatever be his condition, as a human person he is able to have freedom, love and knowledge, which is the first principle essential and fundamental to a free social order.[17]

Again to explicate what Ambedkar means by fraternity he takes maxims from Christians sources:

> Fraternity is the name for the disposition of an individual to treat men as the object of reverence and love and the desire to be in unity with his fellow beings. This statement is well expressed by Paul when he said 'Of one blood are all nations of men. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female; for yet are all one in Christ Jesus.'[18]

Though disappointed by the Christian Churches in India which are not following the approach of Jesus and allowed the caste distinctions to divide them[19] and discriminate the lower castes[20] in their fold, Ambedkar still defends the egalitarianism of Christianity and Islam in his famous "Conversion Speech" at Bombay in 1936:

> Although the castes exist in Muslims and the Christians alike, it will be meanness to liken it to that of the Hindus. There is a great distinction between the caste-system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and Christians. Firstly, it must be noted, that though the castes exist amongst the Christians and the Muslims, it is not the chief characteristic of their body social ....
>
> There is one more difference between the caste-system of the Hindus and that of the Muslims and Christians. The caste system in Hindus has the foundation of religion. The castes in other religions have no sanction in their religion ... Hindus cannot destroy their castes without destroying their religion. Muslims and Christians need not destroy their religions, for eradication of their castes. Rather their religion will support such movements to a great extent.[21]

Ambedkar shows that, as Christianity preaches brotherhood and equality of all, it is attractive to the lower classes and castes, and repulsive to the rich and high castes who prefer to maintain the state of inequality.[22]

4.2.3. Christianity's Humanitarian Service in India

Ambedkar, as most of the Indian leaders do, held Christianity in great esteem for the selfless service it has rendered to the people of India, especially to the Dalits and tribals in the fields of education and health. In 1936, in the address intended to a high caste Hindu voluntary organisation, he held up before them the example of Christian missionaries, and challenges the Hindus if they can do so: "But supposing

a Hindu wished to do what the Christian missionary is doing for these aborigines, could he have done it? I submit not. Civilizing the aborigines means adopting them as your own, living in their midst, and cultivating fellow-feeling, in short loving them. How is it possible for a Hindu to do this?"[23]

The same address also defends the Christians for spreading the light of their religion, with whatever means they deemed fit, but with the good intention of sharing what they thought was necessary for salvation with others. He questions the Hindus who criticise the conversion work: "But really speaking who is better and more worthy of our respect — the Mohammedans and Christians who attempted to thrust down the throats of unwilling persons what they regarded as necessary for their salvation or the Hindu who would not spread the light ...?"[24]

On the same count Ambedkar also found fault with Gandhi: "Mr. Gandhi has been very anxious from the very beginning to keep the Untouchables a closed preserve of the Hindus. He did not want Musalmans or Christians to be interested in them."[25] Ambedkar quotes at length, from the report of C.F. Andrews, Gandhi's friend, of the meeting of the International Fellowship held in 1928. During the meeting Gandhi was questioned by the Christian missionaries, "Whether if they possessed greatest treasure in the world, they would be wrong in wishing to share it." Gandhi who was adamant rebuffed emphatically, "Even the idea of such a desire was wrong." Further adds C.F. Andrews, "and he would not move from the position at all."[26]

Listing the four reasons put forth by Gandhi why Christian missionaries must stop conversions, especially from the Dalits, Ambedkar proves them false. He also shows that Gandhi's attitude towards conversion efforts by the Muslims, the politically powerful community whose support was

badly needed for Gandhi, and towards Christian missionaries was quite different. Hence Ambedkar is forced to conclude:

> It is difficult to understand why Mr. Gandhi argues that services rendered by the Missionaries are baits or temptations, and that the conversions are therefore conversions of convenience. Why is it not possible to believe that these services by Missionaries indicate that service to suffering humanity is for Christians an essential requirement of their religion? Would that be a wrong view of the process by which a person is drawn towards Christianity? Only a prejudiced mind would say, Yes ....
>
> Whatever anybody may say I have no doubt, all the Untouchables, whether they are converts or not, will agree that Mr. Gandhi has been grossly unjust to Christian Missions. For centuries, Christian Missions have provided for them a shelter, if not a refuge.[27]

Our intention in this dispute over conversions between Gandhi and Ambedkar is not to enter into the merit of conversions or its demerits, we will have occasion to do later, but to show how much Ambedkar appreciated the services of Christians in all fields, including sharing their faith with the downtrodden people, and how he defended these rights of the Christians to render services as well as to convert.

Ambedkar repeatedly contrasts Christians with Hindus to show that the service-mindedness, love for the neighbour and the solidarity with the aboriginal Tribals and untouchable Dalits are specific contribution to India. According to him such virtues of love of other and service to humanity are lacking in Hindu ethos due to the caste system.[28] And so, "Comparatively speaking, the achievements of Christian Missions in the field of social service are very great. Of that no one except a determined opponent of every thing Christian can have any doubt."[29]

4.3. Ambedkar's Critique of Indian Christianity

4.3.1. The Measuring Rod of Judgement

As Ambedkar formulated a criterion to judge the value of the ideal scheme of divine governance of religions, so did he also set up a definite criterion with which to judge the value and effectiveness of Christianity in India, its services and activities. In short, the criterion to judge Indian Christianity is, whether it caters to the real needs of the Dalits who also form the majority of its members. Ambedkar presents his measuring scale before he takes up the work of weighing the Christian services. It is again his Dalit critical principle that is at work here:

> Admitting these great services, one may raise two questions. Are these services required for the needs of the Indian Christian Community? Are there any needs of the Indian Christian Community which have not been attended to by Missions?
>
> It is necessary to bear in mind that Indian Christians are drawn chiefly from the Untouchables and, to a much less extent, from low ranking Shudra castes. The Social Services of Missions must, therefore, be judged in the light of the needs of these classes. What are those needs?...[30]
>
> The Indian Christians need two things. The first thing they want is the safeguarding of their civil liberties. The second thing they want is ways and means for their economic uplift. I cannot stop to discuss these needs in all their details. All I wish to point out is that this is a great desideratum in the social work the Christian Missions are doing in India.[31]

Ambedkar, in one of his essays, lists the number of medical and educational institutions run by the Christians in India ranging from small elementary primary level to the higher level large institutions.[32] In another essay he also

quotes the figures showing the amounts of money spent by each Denominational Mission.[33] So he is careful to check the facts before passing judgement. It should also be emphasized that he is critical of the Christians not to discourage their services and conversion work, as does Gandhi, but only to encourage them and to orient them properly and more profitably. The following critical remarks of his must be understood in this light and taken as advice from a close friend interested in the welfare of another.

Hence, it is better to read his final remarks from one of his critical essays on Christians to understand the spirit behind his scathing attacks. Warning the Christians of the criticism of Gandhi and the dangers from Hindu fanatics he says:

> I do not know what Indian Christians will think of what I have said of the weaknesses which infect their life. One thing I can say. It is this — I am deeply interested in Indian Christians because a large majority of them are drawn from the Untouchable classes. My comments are those of a friend. They are not the strictures of an adversary. I have drawn attention to their weaknesses because I want them to be strong and I want them to be strong because I see great dangers for them ahead.[34]

4.3.2. Christian Services Benefit High Caste Hindus

On carefully weighing the work of Indian Christianity, in the field of educational and health services, with measuring rod of benefit to the Dalits, Ambedkar makes known the result of his valuation:

> The Services rendered by the Missions in the fields of education and medical relief are beyond the ken of the Indian Christians. They go mostly to benefit the high caste Hindus. The Indian Christians are either too poor or too devoid of ambition to undertake the pursuit of higher education. High schools, colleges and hostels

> maintained by the Missions are, therefore, so much misplaced and misapplied expenditure from the point of view of the uplift of Indian Christians. In the same way much of the medical aid provided by the Missions goes to the Caste Hindus. This is especially the case with regard to hospitals.[35]

Does the aim of evangelization get fulfilled by these costly works? "No", says Ambedkar:

> I know many missionaries realize this. None the less this expenditure is being incurred from year to year. The object of these services is no doubt to provide occasion for contact between Christian Missionaries and high caste Hindus. I think it is time the Missionaries realised that the pursuit of the Caste Hindus in the hope of converting them to Christianity is a vain pursuit which is sure to end in complete failure...
>
> I have no doubt that this correctly sums up the position. If this is so then the money and energy spent by the Christian Missions on education and medical relief is misapplied and do not help the Indian Christians.[36]

In the esteemed opinion of Ambedkar the resources and services of Christians are thus wasted; neither do all of them benefit the Christians, nor do the non-Christian high caste Hindus, who mostly enjoy their fruits, are attracted to Christianity.

4.3.3. Caste Discrimination in Indian Churches

Christianity's mission is not to render service alone but also to convert. Ambedkar not only acknowledges the right of Christians to convert, as we saw, he also defends this right against the Hindus, especially the national leaders like Gandhi. But what does conversion mean? Is it only to change over from one religion to another, worship of one form of God to another form? Not so for Ambedkar. It means, for Ambedkar, as the Biblical notion of conversion implies, the

change of heart and mind, a reversal of one's attitudes, giving up the old ways of living and starting a new life with a new frame of mind and spirit. Ambedkar calls upon all Indians, the Hindus and the Dalits alike to convert themselves to a new life, to a new value-system, outlook, and attitude towards others. Conversion from caste-system is a must for all.[37]

Dalit are also invited by Ambedkar to convert themselves for the same reason. They need to get rid of the slavish mentality drilled into them by the caste system. They need to purify themselves from the inferiority complex that had gripped their minds and hearts for ages and weakened their spirit and dried up their motivation. They need to convert themselves from the attitudes of enmity, discrimination and division among themselves and with other Dalit castes. These values they have imbibed from prevailing caste system that has poisoned their minds. Conversion to another religion is necessary for these reasons insists Ambedkar.[38]

A new mind, new life, and a new set of egalitarian values cannot be obtained and imbibed if one retains the Hindu religion, based on the hierarchical value system and ideal scheme of caste stratification. On the eve of the Dalit mass conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar affirmed, that the Hindu religion has watered down the enthusiasm of the downtrodden.[39] In his "Conversion Speech" he had emphasized that for Dalits to attain self-respect and dignity, liberty and equality, and to become strong and organized, in short, to be happy conversion was a must.[40]

The critical question posed to Christianity is whether it has achieved all these to the Dalits, whether it has really "converted" them and given them a new life with a new set of values and transformation of minds and hearts. Ambedkar

takes up the discussion on these questions in detail. To begin with, he poses his queries sharply and explains their importance:

> While what has been accomplished by Christian Missionaries in the field of education and medical aid is very notable and praiseworthy, there still remains one question to be answered. What has Christianity achieved in the way of changing the mentality of the Convert? Has the Untouchable convert risen to the status of the touchable? Have the touchable and untouchable converts discarded caste? Have they ceased to worship their old pagan gods and to adhere to their old pagan superstitions? These are far-reaching questions. They must be answered and Christianity in India must stand or fall by the answers it can give to these questions.[41]

He substantiates his answers to the questions drawing facts from the memorandum submitted by the Dalit Christians of South India to the Simon Commission[42] which speaks of discrimination and insults meted out to them by the so-called "caste Christians" who claim superiority and positions. Dalit Christians are segregated in Churches and admission is denied to them in schools and convents. The treatment of caste Christians towards the Dalit Christians is no way different from the Hindu caste people. From this memorandum and other incidents known to him personally Ambedkar concludes:

> This is a terrible indictment. It is a relief to know that it does not apply to all parts of India nor does it apply to all denominations of Christians. The picture is more true of the Catholics than of the Protestants. It is more true of Southern India than it is of the Northern or even Central India. But the fact remains that Christianity has not succeeded in dissolving the feeling of caste from among the converts to Christianity. The distinction between touchables and untouchables may be confined to

> a corner. The Church School may be open to all. Still there is no gainsaying the fact that caste governs the life of the Christians as much as it does the life of the Hindus. There are Brahmin Christians and Non-Brahmin Christians. Among Non-Brahmin Christians there are Maratha Christians, Mahar Christians, Mang Christians and Bhangi Christians. Similarly in the South there are Pariah Christians, Malla Christians and Madiga Christians. They would not intermarry, they would not interdine. They are as much caste ridden as the Hindus are.[43]

Ambedkar was well aware of the caste discrimination in the Christian churches in India and as early as 1936 in his public address to a Christian audience he condemned it.[44] This abomination of Christianity seems to have, among other things, discouraged him and made him give up his inclination to join Christianity. The memorandum of the Dalit Christians submitted to the Simon Commission quoted by Ambedkar could be dated around 1928. The situation did not change after that. He also received personally a similar memorandum, in 1944, from Tamil Nadu, from the Depressed Class Christian Association of Madras seeking his intervention and protection as Missionaries failed to curb the ill-treatment by the caste Christians.[45]

4.3.4. Christianity Made Easy with Caste

Missionaries in general had separated social observances from Christian faith. Hence caste was taken to be of little significance, and so converts were not compelled to give up their caste fellowship or observances as De Nobili had done.[46] About the Lutheran Mission too, Ambedkar says, this separation between social observances and Christian faith continued to be followed, and the incompatibility between caste and Christianity left unquestioned. Swartz "the greatest missionary in India... did not carry on a campaign in support of it."[47] What about the other

missionaries? Did they "take the line that caste must go from the thought and life of the convert? The earliest pronouncement of a Protestant missionary does not warrant an affirmation answer" Ambedkar thinks.[48]

Some of the individual opinions as well as official pronouncements by the Protestant Bishops and Missions are presented by Ambedkar. They reveal not only the past, but also the thoughts cherished even now among some Christians in the recess of their hearts, if not openly asserted. Rev. Heber, who assumed the duties of Bishop of Calcutta in 1823, took up extensive tour in India and Sri Lanka collecting information and opinions to resolve "the sharp conflict of opinion among Protestant Missionaries to the question of toleration of caste among converts."[49] The young missionaries differed with the elder ones regarding the incompatibility of caste and Christianity.

Bishop Heber considering it important to resolve these difference among the missionaries, but impartially and only after collecting needed information, expressed his wise weighty opinion: "It appeared to him, after much deliberate consideration, that Caste, as represented to exist among the Christian converts on the Coast was in reality an institution differing little in its essential features from the social exclusiveness prevailing in Christian countries."[50] Ambedkar notes that though the decision of Bishop Heber was reversed by Bishop Wilson later, it remained the general view among the Protestant Missions in India. An exception is the 1847 resolution of American Missionaries demanding the renunciation of "caste as an essential part of heathenism" and asking the Christian converts to inter-dine.[51]

On scrutinizing all these opinions of the Christian Church[52] on the compatibility of caste with Christianity, starting from 16th century Jesuit Missionary endeavour of

Francis Xavier and his successors, Lutheran Missions, Protestant Missions in Calcutta and Andhra Pradesh and in other parts of South India, the Missions of Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists, Ambedkar finally gives his verdict:

> Thus all Missionaries agreed that Christianity should be made easy in order that it may spread among India. On this point there seems to be difference of kind among Catholics, Lutherners or Protestants. Such difference as exists is one of degree. If there exists Caste and other forms among Christian converts it is the result of this policy — policy of making Christianity easy. In adopting this policy the Missionaries never thought that some day, somebody would ask them 'What good is Christianity for a Hindu if it does not do away with his Caste'. They misunderstood their mission and thought that making a person Christian was the same thing as making him a follower of Christ.[53]

4.3.5. Paganism in Christian Converts

Not only from the oppressive Caste-system, also from their past pagan practices the Christian converts have not been liberated. They continue to practice superstitious and magical practices and have not given up the worship of Hindu gods complains Ambedkar: "There is another things which shows that Christianity has not been effective in wiping paganism out of the converts. Almost all the converts retain the Hindu forms of worship and believe in Hindu superstition. A convert to Christianity will be found to worship his family gods and also the Hindu gods such as Rama, Krishna, Shankar, Vishnu, etc."[54]

Ambedkar points out that the Christian converts go to Hindu pilgrim centres and offer oblations and sacrifices in the temples. They continue to observe, not only Hindu social customs, also the religious ceremonies. And so he challenges Indian Christianity, "In as much as these social prac-

tices have no religious significance it matters very little what they are. But the same cannot be said of religious observances. They are incompatible with Christian belief and Christian way of life. The question is why has Christianity not been able to stamp them out?[55]

It is interesting to note that in the Buddhist "baptism ceremony" that he designed for the conversion to Buddhism, obtaining the advice of prominent Buddhist monks on it, he has included oaths to renounce the worship of Hindu gods and Hindu religious practices. No such ceremony had been in existence in Buddhism which Ambedkar considered a great flaw in Buddhism. The 22 "Buddhist's Oaths" taken at the time of Deeksha include vows rejecting worship of the Hindu gods, the concept of *avatars, samskars* performed by Brahmins and Hindu death ceremonies. These oaths reveal, for Ambedkar, conversion if achieved fully must lead to the avoidance of Hindu practices along with the rejection of Hindu value system.[56]

But why has the Christian conversion failed to achieve this? Why was Christianity unable to stamp out the value-system of caste and its customs, and the religious practices and superstitutious traditions of the past life? Ambedkar does not blame the converts but the Christian Missionaries for this state of affairs: "The answer is that the Christian Missionaries although they have been eager to convert persons to Christianity have never put up a determined fight to uproot paganism from the Convert. Indeed they have tolerated it."[59]

To begin with, Ambedkar finds fault with the Jesuit Madurai Mission, especially the approach of Robert de Nobili. He quotes extensively from J.N. Ogilvie's *Apostles of India,* about the different Jesuit missionary ways and life-styles of Robert de Nobili, John de Britto and Joseph Beschi, who adhered to the policy of "Roman Brahmins".[58] De Nobili had claimed himself to be living for all respects

as a Brahman except his faith. Ambedkar opines that, "The retention by the Converts to Christianity of Paganism is primarily the legacy of the Jesuit Missions which were the earliest to enter the field in modern times. The attitude of the Catholic mission towards paganism has comedown from the outlook and the ways and means adopted by the Madura Mission."[59]

Though it was necessary for Christian Missionaries to have cleansed Indian Christianity of Western customs and given it an Indian look they should not have gone to the extent of adopting Hindu ceremonies and caste-customs. Thus scandalous Western customs were replaced by the sinful Hindu practices laments Ambedkar: "But it was quite shameful and sinful for these Jesuit Missionaries in their zeal for conversion to have gone to the length they did namely, not to mind what the convert thought and did and how he lived so long as he was ready to be baptized, acknowledge Jesus as his saviour and call himself a Christian."[60]

4.3.6. Lack of Revolutionary Movement and Struggle for Social Justice among Indian Christians

Among Christians in general, Ambedkar opines, the sense of justice, united struggle for social and political rights is sadly found wanting. In 1938, he had already expressed this in Solapur. "He told the Christians that their co-religionists in Southern India observed caste system in the churches. Besides they lagged behind politically. If the Mahar boys became Christians they lost their scholarships. Thus there was no economic gain in their being Christians. Moreover, the Indian Christians, he remarked, *as a community never fought for the removal of social injustice.*"[61]

Ambedkar also complained that the Christian community once converted gets into a kind of ghetto-mentality:

> He saw the Christian missions in Western India as 'an instrument of de-socialization' as conversion to Christianity was making Christians of out-caste origin 'selfish and self-centered': 'They don't care a snap of their finger what becomes of their former caste associates ... (they) hide the fact that they were in the same community. I don't want to add to the number of such Christians.'[62]

These cutting remarks of Ambedkar were quoted by Bishpo Pickett of Bombay who met Ambedkar regularly and not by any anti-Christian.

In the essay "The Condition of the Convert", Ambedkar takes up the just mentioned remarks in detail and analyses the facts to diagnose their causes. We cannot but quote these passages again at great length, as in them Ambedkar goes into minute analytical details and has much to tell the Christians, albeit in critical terms. Having discussed the first part of the question whether Christianity was able to change the old mentality and practices of Dalit Christian converts, he takes up the second part of the question whether Christianity has brought about change in the social status of Dalit Christians. After proving that Christianity has not brought about any change in the social status of Dalit Christians, who are treated by Hindus as they were before their conversion, Ambedkar proceeds to seek reasons for this sad situation:

> The question is, why has Christianity not succeeded in raising the status of the untouchable convert? What are the reasons for this failure?... I must begin by pointing out that a change in the social status of the convert can be the result of a two-fold change. There must be a change in the attitude of Hindus. Secondly there must be a change in the mentality of the convert. Status is a dual matter, a matter *inter se* between two persons and unless both move from their old position there can be no change.

> What has been done by those who are in charge of Christian endeavour to make the parties move on? A consideration of this question will enable us to understand why Christianity has failed to raise the status of the untouchable convert.
>
> Let us consider the question in parts. What has Christianity done to make the Hindus move on? I find they have done nothing ...
>
> Let me take the other part of the question. Does Christianity inspire the untouchable to move on? I am constrained to say that (it) does not. So far as I am able to see, Christian preaching to the untouchable is less centered on 'practical' reforms and more centred around the development of Christian social attitudes.[63]

The main reason why Christianity is unable to transform the Dalits, motivate, and empower them for action is due to over "spiritualization". So Ambedkar accuses the Mission personnel and the Dalit Christians of forgetting the social relevance and preaching the empty doctrine. He is sad to see, in the face injustice done to their own people the Missionaries and Christians are unmoved:

> The Christian Missionaries have never thought that it was their duty to *act* and get the injustice, that pursues the untouchable even after his conversion to Christianity, removed. That Missions should be so inactive in the matter of the social emancipation of the untouchable is of course a very sad thing. But far more painful is the inaction of the untouchable who becomes a convert to Christianity. It is the saddest thing. He continues to suffer from the Hindus the same disabilities which were his lot before conversion. It is an extraordinary thing that the movement for the redress of wrongs is carried on by the untouchables who have not become converts to Christianity. I have never noticed the untouchable Christian meeting in Conferences for the redress of their social

> wrongs. That they have grievances is beyond question. That there are many who are educated enough to lead them in their struggle is also well known. Why is it then there has been no movement for the redress of their wrongs?[64]

Why have the Dalit Christians also remained passive? Why have they failed to raise a movement? Ambedkar troubled by this question, seeks out the reasons for the lethargy of Christian Dalits.[65] While they have remained largely uneducated, the educated high caste Christians are not desirous of taking up their cause, nor are they united among themselves. Dalit Christians lack leaders to mobilize them. Christian community is not an united community, it is a composite of various classes and castes. The mental make-up of Dalits is characterised by the absence of urge to break their bonds. They have not joined Christianity because they like the Bible, nor due to their hatred for Hinduism, rather for the sake of a few advantages. The old faith still remains in them and Christianity is just superimposed on it.

Ambedkar also points out another more important reason for the lack of motivation in Christian Dalits to initiate a revolutionary movement: "The second reason for the absence of any urge is due I am afraid to the teachings of the Christian Church. The Christian Church teaches that the fall of man is due to his original sin and the reason why one must become Christian is because in Christianity there is promise of forgiveness of sins."[66] Content that one's ancestors' sin is responsible not one's own, the convert "instead of being energized to conquer his environment" gives up the struggle:

> When he was a Hindu his fall was due to his Karma. When he becomes a Christian he learns that his fall is due to the sins of his ancestor. In either case there is no escape for him. One may well ask whether

> conversion is a birth of a new life or a condemnation to the old."[67]

Ambedkar has also criticized, the fact that among the Christians, faith has become a matter of inheritance. It does not take root in the new generations as a personal conviction. In 1946, responding to the suggestion that had been given by Rev. Livingston regarding the conversion of the Untouchables to Christianity, Ambedkar said, "Religion among Christians, as well as non-Christians is mere matter of inheritance. The Christian inherits his father's property and along with it his father's religion. He never stops to contrast Christianity with other religions and to make his own judgment as to its superior value."[68]

4.3.7. Christianity — an Otherworldy Opium?

The essay, "Buddha or Karl Marx", discussed earlier had taken up the discussion about Communists' attitude towards religion. Ambedkar blames the Communists who "carried their hatred of Christianity to Buddhism without waiting to examine the difference between the two."[69] He proceeds to state the charges Communists level against Christianity without refuting them as he is wont to do if he were to disagree. Thus implicitly he seems to have accepted their charges to be true and valid. Ambedkar states these charges of the Communists and shows that they cannot be levelled against Buddhism which differs in these respects from Christianity:

> The charges against Christianity levelled by the Communists two-fold. Their first charge against Christianity was that they made people other worldliness and made them suffer poverty in this world...
>
> The second charge levelled by the Communists against Christianity cannot be levelled against Buddhism. This charge is summed up in the statement that Religion is the

> opium of the people. This charge is based upon the Sermon on the Mount which is to be found in the Bible. The Sermon on the Mount sublimates poverty and weakness.[70]

In this context, we are to also recall Ambedkar's critique of all theistic religions and how he altogether rejects the worship of God and the salvation of soul as part of true religion. From this point of view, Christianity, for Ambedkar, is also irrational and superstitious. He is also critical of the founders of religions like Jesus except the Buddha, who claim divinity for themselves as divine messengers and recipients of divine revelation, which is not possible. Ambedkar also shows dislike to the title "Son of God" claimed by Jesus. While the Buddha claimed no divinity and no place for himself in his *Dhamma,* and never claimed to be the giver of revelation or salvation, *moksha-data,* but only a *marga-data,* Christ claimed all these complaints Ambedkar.[71]

4.4. Suggestions for Christianity from a Friend

4.4.1. Reasons Why Christianity is not Counted in India

A good friend of Christianity that Ambedkar claimed to be, he really was, and he supported the Christians in the Round Table Conferences. He concludes his essay "The Condition of the Convert", with a few suggestions that would make Christianity a force in India and make it "to be strong".[72] He deals specifically in this section with the question whether Indian Christian Community does count in India. Taking support from two letters that appeared in *Young India,* penned by two Indian Christians, one of which refers to Gandhi's omission of Christians whenever he enumerates Musalmans, Hindus, Sikhs, etc.[73] Ambedkar sharply focuses the question and gives a critical analysis of the situation of Christians in India and the reasons for their being taken lightly inspite of their high educational level.

Pointedly he queries, "Does the Indian Christian Community count in India? What importance, what influence does it have in settling the affairs of the country. It ought to have importance and influence both in the country and society. It is undoubtedly the most educated and enlightened community in India..."[74] Then he answers bluntly, "With all this light and learning the Christians as a community, it must be said, counts for very little — if at all — in the affairs of India."[75]

Without stopping at revealing the unpalatable truth regarding the position of Christianity in India, as usual Ambedkar proceeds to inquire into the reasons for the lack of recognition. He muses, "What can be the reasons for such a position? The most obvious reason is of course the smallness of its numbers. The weight of its numbers is too small to make its existence felt as a force in public life as can be the case with the Musalmans or with the Depressed Classes."[76] Fully aware this cannot wholly account for their insignificance, he shows two other factors to account for this. All Christians must carefully take note of these two pitfalls and set them right:

> One is this. The Indian Christians are living in sheltered waters. They are, at any rate, a large majority of them are living in the laps of the missionaries. For their education, for their medical care, for religious ministration and for mot of their petty needs they do not look to Government. They look to the Missions. If they were dependent upon Government they would be required to mobilize, to agitate, educate, and organize their masses for effective political action. For, without such organization no Government would care to attend to their needs and their requirements. They are not in the current and not being in the current they care not for public life, and therefore no recognized place in the public.

> The second reason is that the Indian Christian is a disjointed — it is a better word than the word dis-united — Community. All that it has in common is a common source of inspiration. Barring this one thing which they have in common everything else tends to keep them apart...[77]

Not only by language, race and caste are the Christians divided as all Indians are, also denominations divided them further. Community consciousness and feeling is lacking in Christians Ambedkar points out.

4.4.2. The Scandals and the Need of Witness of Life

In an essay titled, "Christianizing the Untouchable", Ambedkar discusses at length the reason for the slow growth of Christianity in India, inspite of considerable resources of personnel, time and money spent in India by Christians. This question is relevant for him because it directly affects the welfare of the Dalits:

> How old is Christianity in India? What progress has it made among the people of India? These are questions which no one who is interested in the Untouchables can fail to ask. The two questions are so intimately connected that the endeavour for the spread of Christianity would be hopeless if there were not in India that vast body of Untouchables who, by their peculiar circumstances, are most ready to respond to the social message of Christianity.[78]

Then follows the chart of population statistics of various religious communities in India and Burma according to the Census of 1921 and 1931 with a comparison in increase and decrease during the decade. Though Christianity has 32.5% growth, it is almost as much as the growth of Sikh population; "with all this the fact remains that this figure 6,296,763 is out of a total of 352,818,557. This means that the Christian population in India is about 1.7 per cent of the

total."[79] Posing the question, "In how many years and after what expenditure?"[80] he inserts a quote from George Smith's, *The Conversion of India,* that gives the number of missionaries and the converts and the amount of money expended for the same around 1891.

Ambedkar then adds, "it is not possible to give any idea of the resources now utilized in the cause because they are not published. But we have sufficient data to know how many years it has taken to produce these 6 million of converts."[81] The history of Christianity in India, starting from the first century with Apostle Thomas, the arrival of various Missions, the Oriental, Protestant and Catholics, is outlined by Ambedkar in a bird's eye view. Considering that only in the last eight centuries the missionary endeavour was vigorous and organised, Ambedkar concludes, "The total of six million is the fruit gathered in eight centuries. Obviously this is a very depressing result. It depressed Francis Xavier. It even depressed Abbe Dubois... This is a very slow growth indeed and the question is, what are the causes of this slow growth".[82]

The vital question, therefore, is what are the reasons for the slow growth of Christianity in India? Quoting extensively from the apologist and civil servant of the Company, Mr. Kaye's book, *Christianity in India,* for solid proofs, Ambedkar substantiates his arguments. Ambedkar gives three reasons which according to him impeded the growth of Christianity in India. The first reason is the scandalous behaviour that replaced life-witness: "The first of these reasons is the bad morals of the early European settlers in India particularly Englishmen..."[83]

4.4.3. The Impediment of Rivalry between Factions

"The second impediment in the progress of Christianity in India was the struggle between the Catholic and Neo-catholic

Missions for supremacy in the field of proselytization."[84] Ambedkar highlights these conflicts that raged between the two Catholic rites — namely, the Roman and the Syrian Christian conflagrated by inquisitions at Goa by the Portuguese Roman Catholics.[85]

To this conflict Ambedkar also adds, "There was no such open conflict between the Catholic Church and the Protestant Missionaries. There was however, sufficient rivalry between them to prevent co-operation and concerted activity, the lack of which also prevented a rapid growth of Christianity."[86] Then he proceeds to elaborate on the third reason for the slow growth of Christianity in India which is more important in the context of our discussions in this study. It needs to be dealt with at length.

4.3.4. Christianity must return to where it belongs — The Dalit Bhujans

Disappointed at the slow growth of Christianity which would have given hope to Dalits, Ambedkar probes deeper to discover the reasons and, comes up with the last, but most dangerous, of all the causes:

> "The third reason which is responsible for the slow growth of Christianity was the wrong approach made by the Christian Missionaries in charge of Christian propaganda. The early Christian Missionary started his campaign by inviting public disputations with learned Brahmins on the comparative merits of the Christian and the Hindu religions."[87]

Christian Missionaries believed that if they were able to defeat the Brahmins in these disputations and win them over, the masses would easily join Christianity. Hence, to establish contacts with the Brahmins they ran educational and medical institutions. But, that "the Christian Missionary has been deceived is now realized by many. The Brah-

min and the higher classes have taken full advantage of the institutions maintained by the Christian Missions. But hardly any one of them has given any thought to the religion which brought these institutions into existence."[88]

The reason why the disputations between the Christian Missionaries and the Brahmins could not make much head way is that, Ambedkar discerns, they had no common ground between them to carry on the discussion. He clarifies, "That there could be no common ground for disputation between Hindus and Christians is due to the fact that the two have a totally different attitude to the relations of theology to philosophy."[89] Ambedkar quotes Mr. Burn to show, that the educated Hindu when considering religious questions refuses to separate theology from philosophy, while the average Christian considers philosophy as not so essential to his religious beliefs.[90] There is no common ground for evaluation or commendation or condemnation between Hinduism and Christianity Ambedkar holds.

Both rely on and utilize miracles of their founders to attract the people, and in this respect Christians have failed, for, the miracles performed by the Hindu gods are more wonderful and fantastic. Hence, Ambedkar affirms, "As events in India have shown, this was a wrong approach. It was certainly just the opposite to the one adopted by Jesus and his disciples. Gibbon has given a description of the growth of Christianity in Rome which shows from what end Christ and his disciples began."[91] Christianity was the religion mostly composed of "far greater number of proselytes from the lower than from the superior ranks of life... the new sect of Christians was almost entirely composed of the dregs of the populace, of peasants and mechanics, of boys and women, of beggars and slaves."[92] Even in the Middle Ages most of the Christians were from the lower classes.[93]

"This only shows that the people to whom Christianity made a natural appeal were the poorer classes and it is

among them that Christianity first spread without the help of law or other extraneous advantage."[94] But why is Christianity more attractive, down the centuries from the beginning through the middle and upto today, especially in India, to the lower classes and castes of the society than to the higher classes and castes? Ambedkar does not fail to discuss this question. A social scientist that he was, he applies the principles of Sociology of Knowledge and Social Psychology to analyse this phenomenon and discover the reasons. He arrives at the conclusion that, Brahmins and the higher castes would not be drawn to Christianity, though would enjoy many benefits from its institutions, *because its core message of brotherhood and equality of all would not appeal to them. Instead it is a threat to their social position and prestige. They would stand to loose their opportunity for domination and exploitation.*[95]

Fortunately, some of the missionaries realised this fact and turned to the lower classes and castes, otherwise it would have been disastrous to Christianity and a loss for India especially to the Dalits. Ambedkar reminds the Christians of this turn of events.[96]

4.5. Conclusion

Unfortunately, the strong criticism levelled against the Indian Christianity by Ambedkar is still applicable to a large extent even after about half a century. In some areas things have gone bad to worse. For example, there is an increase in the amounts of funds, infrastructure, personnel and resources of Christian Churches that benefit the rich high caste people more than the Christian Dalits. Caste discrimination in the Churches has not declined though the authorities and leaders have officially condemned it.[97] The Dalit challenge to Christianity still remains.

NOTES

1. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Vol. 2, p. 157.
2. See, D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 299.
3. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 453.
4. Cf. *ibid.,* Vol. 3, p. 166.
5. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 299.
6. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 440.
7. *Ibid.,* p. 441.
8. *Ibid.,* pp. 441-443.
9. *Ibid.,* p. 376.
10. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 493.
11. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 444.
12. Paradkar, "Religious Quest of Ambedkar", p. 59.
13. *Ibid.,* p. 60.
14. *Ibid.,* p. 61.
15. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 445-450.
16. *Ibid.,* Vol. 3, p. 99.
17. See, *Ibid.,* pp. 95-96.
18. *Ibid.,* p. 97.
19. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 455-456.
20. Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 299.
21. *Why Go for Conversion?,* pp. 19-20.
22. See, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 443-444.
23. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 53.
24. *Ibid.,* p. 54.
25. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 317.
26. *Ibid.,* p. 445.
27. *Ibid.,* p. 450.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.,* p. 452.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.,* p. 453.
32. See, B.R. Ambedkar, "The Condition of the Convert", *ibid.,* p. 451.

33. See, B.R. Ambedkar, "Christianising the Untouchables", *ibid.,* pp. 427-428.
34. *Ibid.,* p. 476.
35. *Ibid.,* p. 452.
36. *Ibid.,* pp. 452-453.
37. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 78.
38. See, *Why Go for Conversion?,* pp. 20-22.
39. See, D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 502.
40. See, *Why Go for Conversion?,* pp. 20-22.
41. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 454.
42. See *ibid.,* pp. 454-455.
43. *Ibid.,* pp. 455-456.
44. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 299.
45. See, *ibid.,* pp. 364-365.
46. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 458.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 460.
48. *Ibid.,* p. 465.
49. *Ibid.,* p. 466.
50. *Ibid.,* p. 468.
51. *Ibid.,* p. 469 see the footnote.
52. See, *ibid.,* pp. 456-460.
53. *Ibid.,* pp. 469-470.
54. *Ibid.,* p. 456.
55. *Ibid.*
56. E. Zelliot, "Religion and Legitimation in the Mahar Movement", pp. 103-104; see also D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 500.
57. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 456.
58. *Ibid.,* p. 460.
59. *Ibid.,* p. 456.
60. *Ibid.,* p. 460.
61. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 299. Italics mine.
62. Cited in Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar", pp. 60-61. The book of Bishop Pickett where the quote appears is, *Christ's Way to India's Heart.*
63. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 470-471.
64. *Ibid.,* pp. 471-472.

65. See, *ibid.,* pp. 472-473.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.,* p. 473.
68. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 386; see also, p. 501.
69. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 460.
70. *Ibid.*
71. See, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 151.
72. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 476.
73. See, *ibid.,* pp. 473-475.
74. *Ibid.,* p. 473.
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.,* p. 475.
77. *Ibid.,* p. 476.
78. *Ibid.,* p. 426.
79. *Ibid.,* p. 427.
80. *Ibid.*
81. *Ibid.,* p. 428.
82. *Ibid.,* p. 430.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.,* p. 435.
85. *Ibid.,* pp. 435-438. Ambedkar draws much from Kaye, *Christianity in India,* to support his reasons.
86. *Ibid.,* p. 438.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.,* p. 439.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Cf. *ibid.*
91. *Ibid.,* p. 441.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.,* p. 443.
94. *Ibid.*
95. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 443-444.
96. See *Ibid.,* p. 444.
97. For the present condition of Dalit Christians which has not changed much from Ambedkar's time, see, M. Azariah, *The Un-Christian side of the Indian Church, the Plight of the*

Untouchable Converts, Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1989; V.T. Rajshekar, *Christians and Dalit Liberation,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1987; Jose Kananaickal, *Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin,* New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1983. On Tamilnadu Dalit Christians, see, J. Kananaickal, *Scheduled Caste Converts and Social Disabilities,* New Delhi, ISI, 1990; Harjinder Singh, ed., *Caste among Non-Hindus in India,* New Delhi, National Publishing House, 1977, and articles in *Jeevadhara* 22, 128 (March 1992).

On Christian Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, see reports in M.E. Prabhakar, ed., *Towards a Dalit Theology,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1988; G. Prakash Reddy, "Caste and Christianity: A Study of Shudra Caste Converts in Rural Andhra Pradesh," in V. Sudarsan *et. al.,* eds., *Religion and Society in South India,* Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corp., 1987, pp. 113-128; and the special issue on "Andhra Christians", *Religion and Society,* 37:1 (March 1990).

For an account of Dalit Christians in Kerala, see, George Koillparampil, *Caste in the Catholic Community in Kerala,* Cochin, St. Teresa's College, 1982. For a glimpse of North Indian Dalit Christians, see Deepak K. Behera, *Ethnicity and Christianity: Christians Divided by Caste and Tribe in Western Orissa,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1989.

For a grasp of the cultural alienation of Dalit Christians, see K. Wilson, *Twice Alienated, Culture of Dalit Christians,* Hyderabad, Booklines Corporation, 1982.

For a historical study of the attitudes and policies on caste of the various Christian Missions in India, see, Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity,* London, Curzon Press, 1980; L. Stanislaus, *The Liberative Mission of the Church among Dalit Christians,* Delhi, ISPCK, 1999; S.L. Raj and G.F.X. Raj, eds., *Caste Culture in Indian Church,* New Delhi, ISI, 1993; Antony Raj, *Children of a Lesser God: Dalit Christians,* Madurai, IDEAS, 1992; and Ambrose Pinto, *Dalit Christians: A Socio-Economic Survey,* Bangalore, Ashirvad, 1992.

CHAPTER 5

Dalit Hermeneutics of Buddhism

5.0. Introduction

The first part of the chapter deals with Ambedkar's reasons for his option of Buddhism, though they appear also in the earlier parts while contrasting other religions and ideologies with Buddhism. This chapter ends with the presentation of the interpretative principles of Ambedkar. They are used by him in his reinterpretation of Buddhism. These are based on rationalism, utilitarianism, rejection of poverty and liberation of Dalits. The norms of justice and social utility, designed by Ambedkar as criteria to judge religions, are again used by him in the choice of new religion and the innovation of *Navayana Buddhism.*

The main principles of Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism are related to the fact that he was consciously in search of a religion of equality. Quest was on for a religion suited for his own Dalit people to transform their minds and usher in a cultural revolution by breaking the shackles of caste-mindedness. For Dalits a new religion was essential to regain human dignity, and make them brave and empower them to liberate themselves to build up a just, free, egalitarian social order based on liberty, equality and fraternity. This is the reason why we consider Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism and its revival as Neo-Buddhism, the core of Mahar movement.

5.1. Option to Revive Bauddha Dhamma

As mentioned earlier, as early as 1935, Ambedkar had publicly declared, "Even though I am a Hindu born, I will

not die a Hindu".[1] Yet, he took about 20 years to finally serve his final verdict on Hinduism, after giving enough thought to arrive at mature decision and giving it a chance to reform and reconstruct itself.[2] From then on, he was in search of a religion that would stand the test of the norms he had set to try the religions, a religion that would sanctify the just, free, egalitarian, moral social order and divine ideal, a religion that would be rational and scientific, a religion that would be able to liberate the depressed classes and oppressed castes.

Ambedkar considered himself Moses who would lead his people, the Untouchables, to a land of freedom and prosperity who would bequeath them with a religion and law that would be based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. He was not as harsh with religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, as he was with Hinduism in condemning them. He was aware that they advocated a "free social order"[3] based on justice, equality, fraternity and liberty. The principle of equality is essential to their ideal scheme of divine governance, though in practice, elements of caste are found in their societies, especially in Islam and Christianity in their present Indian form. But finally, he rejected all these religions, mentioned above, and chose to revive Buddhism as the only religion suitable for the Dalits and for modern times. Why did he reject all these religions and opt for Buddhist *Dhamma* which is considered a "dead" religion?

Buddhism had attracted Ambedkar even from his adolescence. On 25th, July 1950, addressing a meeting organised under the auspices of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, he said that he had been interested in Buddhism ever since his boyhood.[4] D.C. Ahir gives a review of the chronology of events that finally led Ambedkar to embrace Buddhism:

> ... when Ambedkar was sixteen years old, he was presented with K.A. Keluskar's *Buddha Charitra* — Life of Buddha — in Marathi. In 1945, he attended a Buddhist Conference in Ahmedabad. On 20th June 1946, he established the Siddharth College in Bombay. The Buddha is known, of course, as Siddhartha Gauthama. In 1948 he wrote a foreword to Prof. L. Narasu's book *The Essence of Buddhism*. In 1950 Ambedkar took part in the first modern Buddhist procession in Delhi. This was the year that the Indian Constitution, chiefly drafted by Ambedkar, was adopted by the Constituent Assembly.

Ahir claims that due to Ambedkar's influence as the architect of India's Constitution, the Ashok Chakra (Wheel of Law) was put on the flag of India; and the Lions from an Ashokan Pillar at Sarnath were adopted as the National Emblem. It was while Ambedkar was staying with R.L. Soni, Founder Director of the World Institute of Buddhist Culture in Rangoon in December 1954, in connection with the Third World Federation of Buddhists, that he made up his mind to embrace Buddhism. Keer says that on New Years Day 1955 it was rumoured in India that Ambedkar had chosen to follow Buddhism. He waited deliberately for 1956 — the 2500th year of the Buddhist era — and on 14th October, Vijaya Dashami Day, as did Ashoka, he embraced Buddhism.[5]

On the eve of great mass conversion, on October 15, 1956, Ambedkar spelt out the reasons for joining Buddhism by reviving it. The salient features of this long speech are important to grasp the significance of his historic decision:

> The fundamental principle of Buddhism is equality. Of all the Bhikkus who joined the Order in the time of the Lord Buddha about 75 percent of the Bhikkus belonged to the Brahmin caste and the remaining 25 per cent were the Shudras... There was only one man who raised his voice against separation and untouchability and that was

> the lord Buddha — Buddhism is the only religion which does not recognize caste and affords full scope for progress. Buddhism as does Christianity affords hope to the down-trodden. If there is any name which is known outside India, which is popular and revered, it is not the name of Rama or Krishna, but it is the name of the Buddha....
>
> Buddhism is based on reason. There is an element of flexibility inherent in it which is not found in any other religion...
>
> Buddhism decries the existence of God and soul. The real basis of Buddhism is the rational way to eradicate suffering.
>
> So long as justice is not respected in the world there cannot be any peace. Buddhism and Buddhism alone can save the world.[6]

The reason for Ambedkar rejecting all the theistic religions, and especially the foreign religions like Islam and Christianity, so as not to strengthen the anti-national forces, have been discussed earlier. In his estimate, the only religion fit for mental make up of rationalism coloured by agnosticism, for motivating and empowering people towards the service of the down-trodden, and to wage fight for justice is Buddhism. Above all, it is the religion of native India, the original religion of the non-Brahmin Indian masses, so ancient, yet so modern. It is a religion based on the principles of equality, fraternity and liberty. A religion that functioned as a democracy and struggled for revolution to abolish caste and sex discrimination, to overthrow superstitious sacrifices and religious ceremonies, and the oppression and the exploitation of religion.

Ambedkar told the press during the *Deeksha* ceremonies, that conversion to Buddhism is truly nationalist in spirit and Dalits would protect the nation. He reminded

them of the promise he had given to Gandhi, that is, "I will choose only the least harmful way for the country. And that is the greatest benefit I am conferring on the country by embracing Buddhism; for Buddhism is a part and parcel of Bharatiya culture. I have taken care that my conversion will not harm the tradition of the culture and history of this land."[7] He also made it clear that, had Hinduism allowed Dalits to possess weapons, India would not have been enslaved at any time.[8]

In May 1956, in his talk broadcasted by the B.B.C., concerning "Why I like Buddhism and how it is useful to the world in its present circumstances", Ambedkar had explained how Buddhism stands the trial set for the religions by him and is relevant to modern society with a scientific outlook: "I prefer Buddhism ... because it gives three principles in combination which no other religion does. Buddhism teaches *prajna* (understanding as against superstition and supernaturalism), *Karuna* (love), and *samata* (equality). This is what man wants for a good happy life. Neither god nor soul can save society."[9]

5.2. Ambedkar's Interpretation of Navayana Buddhism — Return to the Original Sources

Buddhism is an ancient *Dhamma*. The Buddha lived around 563-483 B.C. as Ambedkar agrees with the general opinion of the scholars. Buddhism has undergone various changes and reinterpreted again and again down the ages to this day. The main sects in which it took form are Hinayana Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism. Each of these forms resulted due to the influences of either *bhakti, tantric, siddha* trends, the re-interpretation of the Buddha's original teachings according to these trends, and according to the new exegencies of people and the ingenuity of the innovators.

Ambedkar strove to innovate Buddhism so as to make it relevant to our times. To do so he worked very hard. "He made so huge collection of books on Buddha and Buddhism that it makes a small library in itself. He collected in his library books from India and abroad *all* the texts of *tripikas,* their translations, commentaries, all the available biographies of Lord Buddha and even small pamphlets on Buddhism and issues of Buddhistic periodicals."[10]

Ambedkar knew about different forms and various interpretations of Buddhism. They are mentioned by him in *The Buddha and His Dhamma.* In the life time of the Buddha already there were differences of opinion about his teaching. Ambedkar mentions the dispute regarding *Karuna,* whether it was a pillar of the Buddha's religion or not.[11] There were not only doubts but also misunderstandings[12] and misinterpretations,[13] and so Ambedkar gives a set of criteria to dispel them.[14] Ambedkar is aware that there is a variant Burmese Buddhist interpretation of death prevalent even now.[15]

As he begins writing the portion on the *"Dhamma,"* and his interpretation of "What the Buddha Taught", Ambedkar lists "Different views of the Buddha's Dhamma" an "What others have understood him to have taught":

> "What are the teachings of the Buddha?" This is a question on which no two followers of the Buddha or the students of Buddhism agree. To some Samadhi is his principal teaching. To some it is Vippassana (a kind of Pranayam). To some Buddhism is esoteric. To others it is exoteric. To some it is a system of barren metaphysics. To some it is sheer mysticism. To some it is a selfish abstraction from the world. To some it is a systematic repression of every impulse and emotion of the heart. Many other views regarding Buddhism could be collected.[16]

Ambedkar tried to turn to Buddha's original teachings and *Dhamma* and the social order advocated by him. He had

preferred among the various Buddhist forms the original Hinayana rather than the Mahayana form.[17] But "on the evening of October 13, Ambedkar held a press conference. He told newsmen that his Buddhism would cling to the tenets of the faith as preached by Lord Buddha himself, without involving his people in differences which had arisen on account of Hinayana and Mayayana. *His Buddhism would be a sort of Neo-Buddhism or Navayana.*"[18]

5.3. Hermeneutic Principles of Ambedkar

In his article titled, "Buddha and the Future of His Religion" contributed to the May issue of Mahabodhi Society in 1950 itself, Ambedkar formulates four principles according to which he would reinterpret Buddhism. These are similar to the norms he set forth as requirements for qualifying a religion to be valuable to the society:

> The society must have either the sanction of law or the sanction of morality to hold it together. Without either the society is sure to go to pieces. Religion, if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is another name for science. It is not enough for religion to consist of a moral code, but its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality and fraternity. Religion must not sanctify or ennoble poverty.[19]

Ambedkar's principles, for interpreting Buddhism are rationalism and utilitarianism coupled with Socialism. He not only consciously employs them, also recommends them to those who are in doubt regarding the authenticity of the Buddha's teaching, as test-stones to clear the misunderstanding and confusion:

> One has therefore to be very careful in accepting what is said in the Buddhist canonical literature as being the word of the Buddha. There is however one test which is available. If there is anything which could be said with confidence it is: He was nothing if not rational, if not

> logical. Anything therefore which is rational and logical, other things being equal, may be taken to be the word of the Buddha. The second thing is that the Buddha never cared to enter into a discussion which was not profitable for man's welfare. Therefore anything attributed to the Buddha which did not relate to man's welfare cannot be accepted to be the word of the Buddha...[20]

This test for dealing with the teachings of the Buddha, Ambedkar offers, is to distinguish between those matters in which the Buddha was certain and those in which he was not and so gave only tentative views.

Social relevance, that is making the *Dhamma* relevant to the present Indian context and to the unequal oppressive situation of the Dalits, should be considered the major principle and key to his interpretation. For, the above mentioned second test of the three prescribed by him, to clear the doubts that arise out of confusion and suspicion, again reiterates the use of the principle of existential social utility as important in interpreting the *Dhamma.* Ambedkar, with other Dalits, was in search of a religion with a revolutionary social message and the ideal of equality, that enforces the moral social order of a class-casteless prosperous fraternal society.

Ambedkar was also desperately in quest of and consciously trying to remake a religion, that is relevant for the independent, democratic, socialist, secular, sovereign Republic of India. He was strongly convinced that Hinduism with its Brahminic domination, and the ideology of inequality, that maintains with fear and force the hierarchical social order, of ascending power and descending contempt, as its ideal scheme of divine governance, was no more relevant to new India. As it is evident from his 1956 B.B.C. talk he was also seeking to revive a religion that is relevant and useful to the present world situation.[21]

The Dalit critical principle, which is the key to Ambedkar's Dalit Hermeneusis, is at work, as was shown earlier, in his critique of all theistic religions, and the ideologies of Gandhism and Marxism that is the basis of Indian Communism. It is all the more effective in the reinterpretation of Buddhism. Ambedkar offers a revolutionary version of Neo-Buddhism to his people, the Mahars and other Dalits, reinterpreted to serve the cause of Dalits.

The *Navayana* Buddhism not only strives to transform the minds of its followers, it also leads them on in the revolutionary struggle for the liberation of Dalits. The annihilation of caste, abolition of poverty and establishment of the Kingdom of Righteousness based on liberty, equality and fraternity, resulting in the happiness and peace of all, is the objective of Neo-Buddhism. The critique of the various versions of Buddhism, such as Mahayana, Hinayana, Vajrayana, is not explicated at length by Ambedkar. But it is evident, in his rejection of them, and the reinterpretation of Buddhism utilizing the Dalit Critical Principle.

In the following sections we show Ambedkar's hermeneutical principles of reinterpretation at work. After briefly presenting the main doctrines of Neo-Buddhism which have gained prominence due to Ambedkar's reinterpretation, we shall demonstrate the various theories of Marxism, Socialism and Scientific rationalism that have influenced Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism.

5.4. Wisdom with Love: Gospel of Buddha according to Ambedkar

Only a part of the religious revolution of Ambedkar, namely, "First to produce a Buddhist Bible, second, to make changes in the organisation, aims and objects of Bhikshu Sangha, third, to set up a World Buddhist Mission,"[22] came to be realized. The Buddhist Bible that he authored was first titled

as *Buddha and His Gospel* and was later on changed to *The Buddha and His Dhamma.*[23] Ambedkar consulted all the available sources on the Buddha to write this book, considered to be his *magnum opus.* It is a book of more than 400 pages which was corrected again and again even as it was on print. So much was Ambedkar's concern to make it perfect, up to date, and relevant to the contemporary social situation, that even on the night of his death he lay correcting the preface for the same book.[24] A few copies had been first printed by him and circulated for comments, and the final version was out of the press only in 1957, a few months after his death.[25]

As Ambedkar had originally intended, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* it reads like the Gospels with the biography of Compassionate Buddha interpersed with this teachings. The Buddha's inspiring life, noble mission, loving deeds, and the wise doctrine are combined to make the book a real Buddhist's Bible. Like the *Bible,* it is also broken down into books, chapters, and verses. It is rare to find a book on the Buddha and his Dhamma from which one can learn his teachings and life as much as one does from Ambedkar's gospel on the Buddha. It is in fact derived from Ambedkar's collection of hundreds of books on the Buddha.

The comments of Ambedkar, the original *suttas* and the biography are so inter-twined in, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* at times it is difficult to distinguish who is talking. It is also not clear from where Ambedkar quotes, as he has not indicated the original source. As we shall discuss shortly, Ambedkar has also deliberately emphasized the social message of the Buddha. Ambedkar and reinterpreted his teaching and projected his personality to bring out not only the enlightened Siddhartha Gautama full of wisdom, *prajna*, but also the compassionate one, full of *karuna* and

maitri. It is indeed a social gospel of Buddhism. It lays more stress on love and service than wisdom and insight.

Which doctrines of Buddhism did Ambedkar hold and teach? In the central part of his Bible, Ambedkar dedicates a whole book to summarise the main teachings of the Buddha and the main doctrinal matters regarding the *Dhamma.* He candidly presents what is *Dhamma, Adhamma* and *Saddhamma* according to the Buddha. The main titles and points of the book "What the Buddha taught" are:

> What is Dhamma? It is to maintain Purity of Life; to reach Perfection in Life; to Live in Nibbana; to give up Craving; to believe that all compound things are impermanent; and to believe that Karma is the instrument of Moral Order.
>
> What is Not-Dhamma? Ambedkar makes clear that — Belief in Ishwara (God) is not essentially part of Dhamma, and that Dhamma based on Union with Brahma is a false Dhamma. Adhamma is involved in Belief in the Supernatural, — Belief in Soul, Sacrifices and Speculation; reading books of Dhamma; Belief in Infallibility of Books of Dhamma.
>
> What is Saddhamma? His answer is that — Dhamma is Saddhamma when it makes learning open to all; teaches that mere learning is not enough and may lead to pedantry, that what is needed is Pradnya, that Pradnya is not enough, but must be accompanied by Sila, that besides Pradnya and Sila what is necessary is Karuna, and that more than Karuna what is necessary is Maitri. Dhamma to be Saddhamma must break down barriers between man and man, teach that worth and not birth is the measure of man, and must promote equality between man and man.[26]

"What is the purpose of Religion?", and of the moral religion of *Dhamma* as taught by the Buddha and as interpreted and propagated by Ambedkar in our times? Ambedkar

discusses the answers given by the theistic religions and rejects them: "What is the purpose of Religion? Different religions have given different answers. To make man seek after God and to teach him the importance of saving his soul is the commonest answer one gets to this question... All religions preach that to reach this kingdom of heaven should be the aim of man and how to reach it is the end of all."[27]

If these are not the purposes of religion, what else is it according to the Neo-Buddhists? The answer as formulated by Ambedkar in short is, "To make the world a Kingdom of Righteousness".[28] What does he mean by the Kingdom of Righteousness? What does it entail? What are the means to realize this ideal scheme? Can this goal be reached at all? Ambedkar clears all these doubts in the following verses which he puts in the Buddha's mouth:

> To the question "What is the purpose of religion?" The Buddha's answer is very different. He did not tell people that their aim in life should be to reach some imaginary heaven. The kingdom of righteousness lies on earth and is to be reached by man by righteous conduct. What he did was to tell people that to remove their misery each one must learn to be righteous in his conduct in relation to others and thereby make the earth the kingdom of righteousness.[29]

To this two other purposes are also added, they are, the training of man's mind, instincts and dispositions and the courage to stand by what is right, even alone.[30] A religion that does not have as its core, morality essential for social order and progress, is anathema for Ambedkar. His religion of Neo-Buddhism is nothing else but the way, the *marga,* that would realise not the kingdom of God here on earth or in the other-worldly heaven, in *moksha,* but a religious path which would usher in the just, moral "Kingdom of Righteousness."[31]

This religion of *Dhamma* would not only enforce morality by detachment,[32] it would purify the mind and clense it of all the passions,[33] bring forth harmony, cater to the growth of all the individuals in the society without discrimination, thus fostering equality and fraternity.[34] It would establish proper human relationships essential for happiness,[35] with *karuna* and *maitri*[36] and thus remove sorrow *(Dhukka)*.[37] It would in a special way protect the weak leading their liberation, and stop the class-caste conflicts resulting in a class-casteless society.[38]

Psychological revolution is brought about by shedding of the ego and the desires through detachment and enlightenment. But one cannot stop with this. He/she must continue with the social revolution to remove the causes of *Dukkha*. Love, *karuna with maitri*, demands this. Liberation of the oppressed and the Dalits is the task of the Enlightened persons. Gautama Buddha is the first social revolutionary in history claims Ambedkar. This claim is substantiated in the next section.

5.5. Gautama Buddha, the First Social Revolutionary

Convinced that the social gospel of the Buddha was sufficient for social change, Ambedkar warned that Russian revolution model based on Marxian Communism is not the proper solution to the poverty of Asia. He urged the Asian countries not to abandon Buddhism, the revolutionary religion, that can bring about the same revolution brought about by Communism with no violence at all. The Buddhist countries should shun Communism and reinterpret Buddhism stressing its social message and revolutionary content Ambedkar pleaded:

> The Buddhist Communism brings it about by a bloodless revolution. The South-East Asians should beware of jumping into the Russian net. All that is necessary for them is to give political form to Buddha's teaching. Poverty there is and there will always be. Even in Russia there

> is poverty. But poverty cannot be an excuse for sacrificing human freedom. Once it is realized that Buddhism is a social gospel, its revival would be an everlasting event.[39]

Highlighting the "social gospel" of Buddhism is the salient feature of Ambedkar's interpretation that resulted in Neo-Buddhism. Ambedkar consciously reinterpreted Buddhism with the intention of giving a social gospel to the Dalits that could empower them. He presented Neo-Buddhism as the answer to Marxian Communism. Let us substantiate these points from his *The Buddha and His Dhamma.* At the beginning, on the section on Buddha's Dhamma, Ambedkar raises the question regarding the "social message" of the Buddha and answers the question:

> The question that arises is — "Did the Buddha have no Social Message?" When pressed for an answer, students of Buddhism refer to the two points. They say — "The Buddha taught Ahimsa." "The Buddha taught peace!" Asked — "Did the Buddha give any other Social Message?"
> "Did the Buddha teach justice?"
> "Did The Buddha teach love?"
> "Did the Buddha teach liberty?"
> "Did the Buddha teach equality?"
> "Did the Buddha teach fraternity?"
> "Could the Buddha answer Karl Marx?"
> These questions are hardly ever raised in discussing the Buddha's Dhamma. My answer is that the Buddha has a Social Message. He answers all these questions. But they have been buried by modern authors.[40]

The socialistic interpretation of Ambedkar's Neo-Buddhism is clear in many other places throughout his New Bible for the Dalits. The social message of Buddha is emphasized with Marxian ingredients. Thus Ambedkar did not reject the scientific theories of Marx completely. He accepted private poverty as the cause of human misery, and

class struggle as essential for social liberation. These were incorporated into his reinterpretation of Buddhism:

> He reinterprets, therefore, the cause of suffering in a Marxist way. He writes, "The conflict between classes... is the root of all sorrow and suffering in the world." This he regards as the original and genuine teaching of Buddha. Buddhism thus becomes a solution for the problem of social conflict. It is said to have been born from the examination of the social needs of man. The suffering mentioned by Buddha becomes the social misery of oppression and poverty. The cure does not consist in the extinction of passions, but in their control, so as to enable one to walk on the path of righteousness. Ambedkar's Buddhism is meant to change the world and to make it better, not to escape from it.[41]

Buddhist religious movement is portrayed as the first social revolution in history. The Buddha is presented as social revolutionary, especially in Ambedkar's *Revolution and Counter-revolution* who breaks down the barriers of caste and sex and ushers in an egalitarian society. His *Sangha* is presented as the paradigm of the new just social order, a class-casteless community and as an agent to propagate the Kingdom of Righteousness. *Bikkhus, Bikkhunis, and Sanghas* are meant for the society's welfare, not for their personal sanctification, Ambedkar emphasises. Ambedkar describes Buddhism as a great anti-Brahminic and anti-Aryan revolution:

> Buddhism was a revolution. It was as great a Revolution as the French Revolution. Though it began as a Religious revolution, it became more than Religious revolution. It became a Social and Political Revolution. To be able to realize how profound was the character of this Revolution, it is necessary to know the state of the society before the revolution began its course. To use the language of the French Revolution, it is necessary to have a picture of the ancient regime in India.[42]

Ambedkar proceeds to paint a picture of the Aryan Civilization: "The Aryan Community of his time was steeped in the worst kind of debauchery; social, religious and spiritual. To mention only a few of the social evils, attention may be drawn to gambling. Gambling had become as widespread among the Aryans as drinking."[43] Sexual immorality of all kinds and bestiality are also added to the list. "A sunken priesthood" of Brahmins characterised this society. Brahmins had fallen to the utmost depth of moral degradation.[44] They earned their living by wrong means of livelihood by howarts such as sooth-saying, foretelling,[45] forecasting auspicious time and days, incantations, charms, ceremonies and sacrifices (*yadnas*) that involved regular carnage of cattle.[46]During that time of degradation of the social, religious and political conditions, there appears the greatest and first of all the social reformers, Siddhartha Gautama Buddha. Ambedkar cautions the historians: "The first Social Reformer and the greatest of them all is Gautama Buddha. Any history of Social Reform must begin with him and no history of Social Reform in India will be complete which omits to take account of his great achievements."[47]

"Oppressed by the evils and misery then prevalent in Aryan Society"[48], the Buddha takes up the task of social reformation. Ambedkar weaves a pictures of the Buddha's mission of enlightenment and compassion, who "just as Jesus" spends long hours in prayers and preaching, and is a friend of "publicans and sinners". The Buddha who is commonly known as one who is always seated in meditation, is presented by Ambedkar more as a dynamic, active person:

> To the carrying out of his mission, the Buddha devoted all his days after the achievement of enlightenment. His time was divided between feeding the lamp of his own spiritual life by solitary meditation — just as Jesus spent

> hours in lonely prayer — and active preaching to large audiences of his monks, instructing the more advanced in the subtle points of inner development, directing the affair of the Order, rebuking breaches of discipline, confirming the faithful in their virtue, receiving deputations, carrying on discussions with 'learned' opponents, comforting the sorrowful, visiting kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcastes, rich and poor. He was a friend of publicans and sinners, and many a public harlot, finding herself understood and pitied, gave up her evil ways to take refuge in the "Blessed One".[49]

The Buddha attempted to reform the Aryan Society by his life example more than by preaching about pure life. He avoided the luxuries life-style of Brahmins and refuses to offer animal sacrifices.[50] He strives to "mould the character of the ordinary men and women in society"[51] and monks, by training them in *silas,* the moral virtues. "Secondly he denounced the *Yadna* as a form of religion."[52] Another important aspect of the Buddha's revolution is the attack on caste system:

> Thirdly the Buddha denounced the caste system. The Caste System in its present form was not then existing. The bar against inter-dining and inter-marriage had not become operative. Things were flexible and not rigid as they are now. But the principle of inequality which is the basis of the caste system had become well established and it was against this principle that the Buddha carried on a determined and a bitter fight.[53]

Ambedkar strives to show that while launching an attack on caste system, the Buddha was practicing what he preached. He not only admitted the lower caste Shudras, and people of menial occupation into his Order *Sangh,* as monks, Bikkhus, but also included them in the close inner circle of disciples and associates. Ambedkar lists many names of the prominent low class-caste persons who were

in the Buddha's *Sangh*.[54] Similarly Ambedkar also shows the Buddha to be revolutionary in two other important matters. As regards the treatment of women, who were also treated like the Shudras by the Aryans, the Buddha refused to toe the line of Brahminic rules:

> Just as the Buddha levelled up the position of the Shudras and the low caste men by admitting them to the highest rank namely that of Bhikkus, he also levelled up the position of women. In the Aryan Society women were placed on the same position as the Shudras and in all Aryan literature women and Shudras are spoken of together as persons belonging to the same status. Both of them were denied the right to take *Sanyas,* as Sanyas was the only way open to salvation. Women and Shudras were beyond salvation. The Buddha broke this Aryan rule in the case of women as he did in the case of the Shudras. Just as a Shudra could become a Bhikku so a woman could become a nun. This was taking her to the highest status then conceivable in the eyes of the Aryan Society.[55]

Revolutionary Buddha also breaks the Aryan norm of limiting education to the upper castes, and that too to men alone. He instructs *Shudras* and women, and makes them also in their turn teachers to others, both to low and high castes as Ambedkar emphasises.[56]

Similar picture of the Buddha is also drawn with brighter hues and on bigger canvas with larger figures by Ambedkar in his new Gospel, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.[57] He assigns a chapter and more to everyone of the point made in the summary statements. Bringing together many *suttas,* he proves his point and impresses on us the portrait of a benign and wise Buddha, yet, with a revolutionary social message. Ambedkar's book is in fact a social gospel of the Buddha as is Luke's Gospel of Jesus. He seemed to have attempted to present the Buddha as inspiring and revolu-

tionary as Jesus whom he esteemed to be so. Ambedkar stressed the revolutionary aspect of the Buddha's mission because he offered his Neo-Buddhism as an answer to Karl Marx, and as a better, safer, more successful and sound substitute to the form of Russian Revolution for bringing about a social revolution.[58] Especially in India, for Dalit revolution, it is the most suitable means Ambedkar adjudged, and accordingly he reinterpreted Buddhism.

5.6. Scientific Rational Interpretation of Neo-Buddhism

The rational and scientific principle, that is the other pillar on which Buddha–Dhamma of Ambedkar stands, needs also to be stressed and substantiated. Being a man of science and a philosopher, who was influenced by secular scientific rationalism that swept the West, Ambedkar was cautious to avoid anything that would smack of superstition, and verge on the border of the irrational. Nothing that cannot be proved rationally and argued logically can be part of his philosophy. The influence of Western Philosophy on his modern scientific mind was great. Not solely a single school of thought, but various trends in philosophy such as the secular humanism of Renaissance and Enlightenment, Socialism, Marxism, Positivism, Liberalism, Utilitarianism, engaged his attention and left their marks on his mind.[59]

In the light of all these Ambedkar strove hard to make his new religious sect thoroughly rational. He hinges his arguments unshakably in the Buddha's rational epistemology of "dependent origination", that is, things are related to each other in cause and effect relationship in the ceaseless change of reality.[60] Accordingly, the speculative and supernatural beliefs in God *(Brahman)* or the eternity of the Soul *(Atman)* or heaven *(moksha)* do not enter his scheme. *Dhamma* is not a belief in the supernatural being but the striving for a moral humane fraternal social life. *Dharma* in the Vedic Brahminic religion was to offer sacrifices *(Yagnas)*,

rituals and prayers to worship God (Brahman). These praises, offerings and sacrifices are offered in order to gain heavenly benefits hereafter, along with the earthly gains.

Ambedkar lays stress on the Buddha's reinterpretation of *Dhamma* as morality and his rejection of Brahminic understanding of *Dharma* as sacrifices and prayers. Thus, Ambedkar comes to reject all the theistic religions and the age-old Hindu beliefs. Namely, he rejects as unprovable, the existence of *Brahman,* God, and *atman,* soul, *samsara* theory of transmigration, the *Karma* theory of the effects of past affecting the present life, and the *moksha* theory of life after death. Infallibility of Vedas is not accepted and Upanishadic thought is considered pure imagination.[61]

Further, Ambedkar, while accepting the Buddha and his *Dhamma,* presents him as the most rational and enlightened of human beings, and his *Dhamma* as the most scientific system, at least as Ambedkar understands and interprets it. The Buddha is presented as one who did not force his followers, but who gave complete freedom of thought. He rejected the infallibility of sacred books, divine authority and the revelation. The Buddha, emphasizes Ambedkar, unlike the other founders and innovators of religions like Moses, Jesus, Mohammed does not claim to be of divine origin, nor receiver of divine revelation as a divine prophet. The Buddha claimed to be only an Enlightened human being who, in turn, is a *marga-data,* the finder and giver of the way, and not, as others have claimed to be, a *moksha-data,* giver of salvation.[62]

Finally, according to the rational scientific principle, Ambedkar tries his best with all the intellectual caliber that was at his disposal in great store, to clarify and reinterpret some of the accusations against Buddhism, which he calls "misunderstandings." He gives scientific explanations for the same and proves them to be useful to the society. He is constrained to prove that Buddhism is not pessimistic as

some criticise it to be; if so Karl Marx should also be considered a pessimist retorts Ambedkar.[63]

Similarly, Law of *Karma* is also reinterpreted by him scientifically, as the law of cause and effect. No cause remains without effects including the moral forces. As the whole reality is a inter-relationship of all happenings, effects of moral forces are also bound to occur. The law of *Karma* is to be accepted as easily as "Reap as you sow". Since he rejects the rebirth of the soul, in his opinion there is no chance for the present life and actions of a person to be affected by the previous birth. But the present actions of a person do have their effect on that person in the present life, and on the society now and after the person's death.[64]

In the same manner, the cycle of *samsara* rebirth also gets a scientific explanation with the law of conservation of energy. There is no "soul" in the Buddhist's scheme capable of existing by itself, nor taking rebirth, nor able to exist eternally. What can exist after one's death and can be termed "rebirth" is, the material that emerges as new forms of energy. It is the matter and energies that arise out of the degeneration and dissolution of one's body.[65] Thus, truly Ambedkar's Buddhism is very scientific and rational. Really, it is transformed into "a sort of Neo-Buddhism, Navayana"[66] that he intended to fashion.

5.7. Conclusion

Buddhism, the religion of Indian culture, is adjudged by Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement, to be the best suited one for Dalit liberation because it is able to satisfy all the criteria set for the valuation of religions. Yet, the Dalit Liberative Hermeneutics being critical of its various existing versions, goes back to the sources, to the original teachings of the Buddha to fashion Neo-Buddhism, the *Navayana*. Scientific theories of Modern Physics and Marxian Economics are employed to reinterpret Buddhism. The

interpretative principles of Socialism, Rationalism and Utilitarianism are used in this innovation.

Gautama Buddha is presented as the first social revolutionary who valiantly attacked the caste-system, the oppression of Dalits and women, and established an egalitarian class-caste-less community, the *Sangha.* The Buddha is not only the Enlightenment, he is also the social reformer, compassionate and dynamic. Neo-Buddhism in its essence is morality. It's aim is to establish the Kingdom of Righteousness on earth. It does not believe in the existence of God or soul which are only speculative. The worship of God for the salvation of soul in heaven is nothing but superstition. The Kingdom of Righteousness is not achieved by these, but by good deeds, and by wisdom with love, and by detachment, enlightenment and service to the down-trodden.

Dalit liberation needed a religion that can transform the minds of the Dalits, thus usher in a cultural revolution. It needed a liberative, egalitarian, rational, critical religion that would empower them. Freed from the shackles of Hinduism they armed themselves with the weapons of Neo-Buddhism to continue the struggle of Dalit revolution. Buddhism has accorded dignity and self-respect to Dalits which was the goal of their quest and the purpose of their conversion. As Ambedkar stated during the Baptism ceremony: "Self-respect is more important than the material gains. Our struggle is for honour, for self-respect, not only for the economic progress alone. ... We are struggling for human dignity...."[67]

NOTES

1. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 502.
2. See, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 80.
3. *Ibid.,* Vol. 3, p. 95.

4. Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 424.
5. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar," p. 65; see, D.C. Ahir, *Buddhism and Ambedkar,* New Delhi, Ajay Prahaghan, 1968, pp. 28-32.
6. Cited in, *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64; Paradkar quotes from, Bhagwan Das, ed., *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Jullundur, Bheem Patrika Publications, 1969, Vol. 2, pp. 157-164.
7. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 498.
8. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 502.
9. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 490.
10. S.P. Kanal, "Dr. Ambedkar, the Man of Religion," in *Science-grounded Religion,* Delhi, 86:6 (July, 1991), p. 12.
11. See, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 211.
12. See, *Ibid.,* p. 254.
13. See, *Ibid.,* p. 366.
14. See, *Ibid.,* pp. 254-255.
15. See, *Ibid.,* p. 370.
16. *Ibid.,* p. 158.
17. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar," p. 62.
18. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 498; Italics mine.
19. *Ibid.,* p. 421.
20. *Ibid.,* pp. 254-255.
21. Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 490.
22. Cf. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar," p. 66.
23. See, D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 489.
24. See, *ibid.,* pp. 488 and 513.
25. As desired by Ambedkar, it was published by People's Education Society founded by Ambedkar. For a brief history of the book, see, R.R. Bhole's introductory writings, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. xv-xviii.
26. Paradkar, "The Religious Quest of Ambedkar," p. 69.
27. *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, pp. 200-201.
28. *Ibid.,* p. 200.
29. *Ibid.,* p. 201.

30. See, *ibid.,* pp. 201-203.
31. See, *ibid.,* pp. 200-202.
32. *Ibid.,* pp. 170 and 296.
33. *Ibid.,* pp. 73-74.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.,* pp. 146-147, and 178.
36. *Ibid.,* pp. 38-39.
37. *Ibid.,* p. 83.
38. *Ibid.,* pp. 232-234.
39. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 490.
40. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 158-159.
41. M. Lederle, "The Untouchables' Claim to Human Dignity," *Journal of University of Poona:* Humanities Section, quoted from the off-print, pp. 73-74.
42. *Writings and Speeches,* vol. 3, p.153.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 158-160.
45. Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 162-163.
46. Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 168-176.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 165.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.,* p. 166.
50. See, *ibid.,* pp. 176-186.
51. *Ibid.,* p. 136.
52. See, *ibid.,* pp. 188-204.
53. *Ibid.,* p. 204.
54. See, *ibid.,* pp. 220-221.
55. *Ibid.,* p. 221.
56. Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 221-222.
57. See, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 129-147, pp. 215-221, and pp. 409-426.
58. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 461.
59. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 41-43, and 267-268.

60. Cf. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 247.
61. Cf. M. Lederle, "The Untouchables' Claim to Human Dignity," pp. 71-72.
62. See, D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 420; *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 151-157.
63. See, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 370-371.
64. See, *Ibid.,* pp. 242-248.
65. See, *Ibid.,* pp. 235-241, 371-372.
66. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 498.
67. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Vol. 2, p. 145.

CHAPTER 6

Appraisal of Ambedkar's Dalit Liberation Theology

Let my people go — ***Moses** (Ex. 5.1)*
Go forth to liberate people
— ***Ambedkar**; (cf. Ex. 3.10).*

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapters of this study have presented a demonstration of Ambedkar's methodology in operation and have offered the outcome of the same. They concentrated more on the content of Ambedkar's Theology of Liberation that arose from his critical reflection on the Dalit liberative praxis of the Dalit Movement. Now, in this last chapter, more attention will be paid to his methodology, to discover his Hermeneutical Principles and the characteristics of his Philosophy/Theology. Another important task it undertakes is the assessment of Ambedkar's contribution to the Liberative Philosophy/Theology of Religions, Dalit Theology and Hermeneutics. This chapter begins with a humble effort at providing my own synopsis and synthesis of Ambedkarian Liberation Theology based on his various writings. Then the significant aspects and salient features of Ambedkar's Philosophy/Theology are discussed. A personal appreciation and critique of his thought are attempted in the last part of the chapter.

6.2. Synthesis of Ambedkarian Dalit Liberation Theology

6.2.1. The Dream and the Aim: The Kingdom of Righteousness, Dhamma Raj

6.2.1.1. Dhamma Raj — The Liberation of All

The ultimate vision and goal of Ambedkar's liberative struggle is the Kingdom of Righteousness which, according

to him, is the important purpose of *Saddhamma:* "The kingdom of righteousness lies on earth and is to be reached by man by righteous conduct."[1] The Buddha by his *Dhamma* laid foundation to the Kingdom of Righteousness on earth and urged both the *Bhikkus* and the laypersons to strive for it.[2]

The kingdom of righteousness consists of love, peace and justice for all.[3] It is the total and integral liberation of all, of every human being, every community and every nation on earth. Though Ambedkar struggled all his life to liberate his own community which was the worst affected of all others, he did support the cause of other Depressed Castes, backward classes, minorities and especially the rights of women.[4] The liberation of the Dalits was not an end in itself, nor does it fulfil the ultimate goal of establishing the kingdom of righteousness which entails the liberation of all peoples.

Ambedkar urges the Dalits to work for the liberation of all at the first *deeksha* ceremony: "You must pledge today that you, the followers of Buddha, will not only work to liberate your-self, but will try to elevate your country and world in general ... go forth to liberate people."[5] Dalit revolution is for the liberation of all, to build the Kingdom.

6.2.1.2. The New Society of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity

The ideal of the kingdom of righteousness is realized in practice in a new society that is just and egalitarian, that is based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.[6] The blue print for the new society of Ambedkar's dream was drawn out by him in the Preamble of India's Constitution. All the members of this ideal society are assured of,

Justice — social, economic and political;
Liberty — of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

Equality — of status and of opportunity ...

Fraternity — assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation.[7]

In the new ideal society, "what is important is high ideals and not noble birth. No caste, no inequality; no superiority; no inferiority; all are equal."[8] Thus the new society is socialistic in its economic structure, democratic in political structure and egalitarian in social structure.[9] It is free from every form of exploitation, dictatorship, domination and the oppression of caste, class, gender, ethnic nationality and culture. The just society is where even the weakest group receives recognition, equal respect, dignity and identity, and is bequeathed with special affirmation, reservations and privileges to promote itself.[10]

6.2.1.3. The Divine State of Love, Justice and Peace

The kingdom of righteousness, Dhamma Raj, is where love, justice and peace reign.[11] It is where the fulfilment of every individual person, of every community, and the total humanization of all is fully realized. It is where not only the humans but all creatures are filled with real peace and love.[12] *"It is deemed a state divine",* where universal, unselfish and unstinted love abides in all and where universal peace pervades.[13] It is "the peace which is based on justice and not the peace of a grave-yard. So long as justice is not respected in the world there cannot be any peace."[14]

6.2.2. Dhamma-Marga — The Praxis of Righteousness

6.2.2.1. Saddhamma — The Basis and Force of Revolution

The Kingdom of Righteousness can be realized only through the righteous conduct in thought, word and action: "Man's misery is the result of man's inequity to man. Only righteousness can remove this inequity and resultant misery".[15] Righteousness in conduct is possible only through

"Cleansing the mind of the its impurities",[16] "training the mind to turn bad disposition into good disposition",[17] awareness of the impermanence of all things, cultivation of detachment,[18] controlling of all passions[19] and cessation of all desires and craving.[20]

Only armed with detachment and enlightenment an individual and society can strive for the Kingdom. This psychocultural revolution must precede and accompany the sociopolitical revolution. *"A good disposition is the only permanent foundation of and guarantee of permanent goodness"*, Ambedkar emphasizes.[21]

To state it positively, the process of detachment and enlightenment unleashes the powers of love, which is the basis and the force of revolution. Unless one overflows with "an all-embracing love for all the universe",[22] one cannot worthily and effectively participate in the struggle for the Kingdom. None of the other means employed to attain realization, "has a sixteenth part of the value of loving kindness. Loving kindness, which is the freedom of heart, absorbs them all, it glows, shines, it blazes forth".[23]

The Kingdom of Righteousness can be made an historical reality only if both the monks as well as the lay persons strive in practice to love and serve. Mere preaching "would not result in the creation of that ideal society based on righteousness... Compassion which is the essence of the Dhamma requires that every one shall love and serve, and the Bhikkhu is not exempt from it. A Bhikkhu who is indifferent to the woes of mankind, however perfect in self-culture, is not at all a Bhikkhu".[24]

6.2.2.2. Religion — The Sign and Sacrament of the Kingdom

Religion, for Ambedkar, has a social function of humanization, which is the historical realization of the Kingdom of Righteousness. The main purpose of religion is

to usher in the Kingdom by preaching and propagating it, and training the minds of the people with proper disposition and courage, with detachment and enlightenment, and with loving service and wisdom to fight for the Kingdom.[25] It equips us with courage and power to struggle against the evil oppressive forces.[26] For, the purpose of any true religion is to remove suffering, sorrow, misery and poverty from the world. This is the only foundation, the basis, and the justification for religion.[27] This task is achieved by religion by inculcating the right conduct; righteousness alone can remove the inequity which is the real cause of misery.[28]

The Bauddha Dhamma advocates "the *Madhyama Marga (Majjhima Patipada),* the middle path, which is neither the path of pleasure nor the path of self-mortification".[29] Rigid asceticism is not of much use to the world it could turn out to be an escape for the ascetic from the responsibilities in the world, "what is necessary is to change the world and to make it better".[30] Hence, the Buddha established the *Sangha* as the practical model for the ideal egalitarian society of the Kingdom of Righteousness.[31] All people, both monks and laypersons, are urged by him to struggle for the Kingdom with their loving service and courageous fight against the evil ones.[32]

The psycho-cultural revolution wrought by religion is essential for a proper and permanent socio-economic-political revolution. The empowerment and discernment of love with wisdom, needed for the struggle, come through religious traditions, institutions and above all from the inspiration of the founders and other martyrs for the Kingdom.

6.2.2.3. Ahimsic Non-Violent Democratic Strategy

It is not enough to be inspired and transformed by religion, we need the struggle of love for building the Kingdom. Ambedkar firmly believed, that only love can unite the

warring castes in India and bring about peace of the Kingdom. No force or compulsion can bring about peaceful co-existence. Only love and persuasion can effect such a transformation of the minds and social change:

> The touchables and untouchables cannot be held together by law, certainly not by any electoral law substituting joint electorate for separate electorate. The only thing that can hold them together is love, the salvation of the untouchables will come only when the caste Hindu is made to think and is forced to feel that he must alter his ways. I want a revolution in the mentality of the caste Hindus.[33]

Ambedkar's means to realize the Kingdom are ahimsic non-violence, moral persuasion, enlightenment and struggle for justice. Warning against the Communist allurements he said, "I am quite confident that if we all become one tenth as enlightened as the Buddha was, we can bring about the same result by the methods of love, of justice and good will."[34] He strongly advocated the democratic, Constitutional, non-violent methods of obtaining justice. Militant struggles and agitations are necessary only if these fail, he maintained, admitting their inevitability.[35]

Ambedkar did not advocate violent open wars between Dalits and others, he wanted love and peace to reign between them. Jatava makes it clear that "in no way, Dr. Ambedkar favoured a class war between the touchables and the untouchables in India".[36] But he did not prohibit the use of violence when necessary to save or defend oneself and the nation. Realizing that the strict *ahimsa* of Jainism is not practical in life, Ambedkar followed the Buddhist *ahimsa*.

The Buddha taught that *ahimsa* "was fundamental. But it was not absolute. He taught that evil should be cured by the return of good. But he never preached that evil should be allowed to overpower good. He stood for Ahimsa. He

denounced Himsa. But he did not deny that Himsa may be the last resort to save good being destroyed by evil".[37] Ambedkar clarified that when the Constitutional methods fail to achieve socio-economic transformation, the unconstitutional methods can be justified.[38] Democracy is the path of the Kingdom and only democratic means can bring it about; violence leads to destruction and dictatorship.[39]

6.2.2.4. The Satyagraha Struggle — "Educate, Agitate, Organize"

Like Gandhi, Ambedkar was a firm believer in the effectiveness of the means of *satyagraha* to build the just society of the Kingdom.[40] When moral pressure and persuasion, dialogue and negotiations do not make one realize the injustice and do reparation, the methods of organized struggle and agitation and the mass mobilization are necessitated. These militant actions, though are not strictly non-violent, yet they do not resort to violent destruction of persons and property. They take the forms of campaigns, strikes, rallies, agitations, forceful occupations, non-cooperation, boycotts, etc.

Ambedkar initiated many *satyagrahas* and strikes for the rights of the Dalits and the working class. He advised Dalits to organize themselves and fight unitedly for their rights. He gave them the slogan, *Educate, Agitate, Organize*.[41] He bequeathed a religion that would not only "teach man to know what is right and to follow what is right"[42] but also train their minds with proper disposition and give "courage to stand by what is right even if one is alone".[43]

The struggle for liberation is a spiritual task, based on spiritual force, not on man-power, money-power, nor muscle-power. It is a spiritual battle for life and human rights. It is a sacred struggle for humanization and divinization, not, merely for material possessions and social positions, as Ambedkar reminds the Dalits often:

> My final words of advice to you is *educate, agitate and organize;* have faith in yourself. With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of joy. *The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual.* There is nothing material or social in it. For ours is a battle, not for wealth or for power. It is battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality.[44]

6.2.2.5. The Spiritual Mission of Political Praxis

Besides the united struggles of the mass movements, political action and participation is very essential for the liberation of the oppressed and the struggle for the Kingdom. Ambedkar was fully conscious of this and took part in politics for about thirty years of his life. He advised the Dalits to capture the political power though elections. He organized and led many political parties for the purpose. He admonished the Dalits saying, "You must abolish your slavery yourselves. Do not depend for its abolition upon God or superman. Your salvation lies in political powers..."[45]

Yet, for Ambedkar politics and religion are not opposed to each other. They are inseparable, and it is religion that motivated his politics and defined its goals: "To me politics have never been a game. *It is a mission*",[46] he confessed. Politics, Ambedkar regretted, is "instead of being spiritualized has become grossly commercialized, so much so that it has become a byword for corruption".[47] Political activity is a spiritual task and a religious mission that is demanded of the workers of the Kingdom. To bring about just, egalitarian, socialist society, politicization of the struggle and activity is a must. Religion also must have this political and social thrust in order to motivate the activists in the right direction.[48]

6.3. The Significance of Ambedkar's Contribution to Liberation Theology of Religion

6.3.1. Interpretation of Religion and the Philosophy of Religion

The Philosophy of Religion of Ambedkar is one of the best we have in India. He has made it clear that a Philosophy of Religion should not only be descriptive but also *critical.*[49] which many protagonists of religion forget. The experts in the Phenomenology of Religion, Sociology of Religion and even the Comparative Religion and History of Religions do not go beyond the description of religion. May be it is due to their objectives and methodology. But the philosophers and theologians of religion have no excuse not to be critical of religions. They often turn apologists than critical thinkers.

The insistence of Ambedkar that religion is basically a social phenomenon and that humans may not need a religion if they were to exist individually is also to be noted.[50] Many religious leaders and priests, who over-emhasize only the individual salvation of soul, of personalistic *mukti* and *nirvana* are only exploiting religion for their interests. Any religion that fails to emphasise the social dimension, the social responsibility and the need of social commitment, is a false religion.

According to Ambedkar's analysis of religion,[51] every religion contains primarily a system of ideal scheme and means to attain the same. Every religion proposes an ideal scheme to its followers as the good to be achieved and as the sacred goal, and divine ultimate aim in life. Besides this value-system, religions also suggest a set of means to reach the ideal and goal. All religions may not stress equally all values and some may even neglect essential values. Even if some religions were to emphasise the same ideals, the means that they offer differ.

This method of studying and analysing the religions can easily be extended also to the ideologies such as Marxism or Gandhism as Ambedkar himself did. Theologian of Religion, R. Panikkar, and Liberation theologian, J.L. Segundo, have employed a similar method to the study of religions and ideologies.[52]

6.3.2. The Indispensability of Religion in Society

The questions regarding religion, that haunt and taunt the social activists and the militants involved in the fight for human rights, or the liberation of Dalits and the oppressed poor, have been satisfactorily answered by Ambedkar by his own life and clarified in his writings.[53] He has demonstrated beyond doubt that religion has a role to play in the liberation of Dalits and the non-persons. Religion and revolution need not be opposed to each other, rather religion can serve as the motivation force for revolutionary struggles.

Those who deem religion to be the opium of the masses, a projection of the human desires and needs, an infantile fixity or a superstitious hang over of the savage past, have a good guide in the writings of Ambedkar, who dispels their doubts about its necessity and importance. Many social scientists have confirmed the revolutionary potential of religion.[54]

Ambedkar has shown the vital need of religion for the individual and the society at large. By presenting sacred ideals and humane values, and by reinforcing them in the society, religion helps the development of the persons and the progress of the society. Religion thus preserves, protects, and promotes life.[55] Conservation of life by religious consecration is the law of life. Hence, religion is not a burden enforced by the supernatural powers, be they God or his prophets, and heavenly revelations. It is a vital necessity, arising out of the need for protecting the weak in the

society, and for maintaining peace among the various groups, tribes, classes, races and castes. Religion is, therefore, nothing but morality that is based on the law of love which is the law of life.[56]

6.3.3. The Religion of Humanity and Love

The Religion of humanity, which Ambedkar proposes, is the morality which is based on love.[57] Morality is sacred, it has taken the place of "God" in his Philosophy/Theology. It must not be violated even by the mighty, so that it is able to protect the weak in the society. The basis of this morality is love. The reason for this love is not anything supernatural, it arises from man's natural condition, out of the necessity of peaceful co-existence, the need of protecting oneself and the weak, and to support each other for a happy life on earth. The morality of love arises from the "direct necessity for man to love man".[58] He makes it clear that, it is "not to please God that man has to be moral, rather for his own good that man has to love man".[59]

In the struggle for existence the individual's rights may not be catered for, and at times his or her interests can be endangered by the group. Similarly, a weak group may also be discriminated by a stronger group, hence the indispensability of the law of love, fraternity and brotherhood, which is another name for morality.[60] The most important in *Saddhamma,* more than *Prajna* and *Sila, Sila* is *Karuna,* love of human beings and *Maitri* which is love of all living beings.[61] Thus, love is universal embracing even the natural environment, which is badly needed in our time of eco-crisis.[62] Ambedkar's religion of Social Humanism is thus "inspired by human love and kindness. It has human service as its goal" sums up Jatava.[63] It holds us together in love, leads us to care for the Dalits and the weak, motivates us to strive for their liberation, and impels us to struggle for the universal Kingdom of Justice, love and peace.

6.3.4. The Urgency of Liberative Religion for Revolution

Religion is not an end in itself. It is meant for the preservation of life and human welfare. Hence, religion is not the one that has the final say, it is not infallible, absolute, inflexible nor permanent. Jesus insisted that the Sabbath is made for the humans and not for preventing the saving and the preservation of life of human beings and other animals. So also, Ambedkar stressed that religion is for humans and not humans for religion.[64] For him, "man and morality must be the centre of religion".[65] Humanist to the core, Ambedkar was ready to throw away any religion or religious practice, however, ancient and sanctified, that does not promote human welfare and the liberation of the Dalits and the weak.

Any religion, that enslaves the minds of the people by fear or force, curtailing their liberation and freedom, that denies justice, equality and democracy, that hinders universal fraternity, is no religion at all. Such religious practices, ceremonies and customs are to be rejected, and such doctrines are to be corrected. Even when a single person or small group is oppressed by a religion, a religious person or a religious class, that religion is in need of urgent reform. Domination of the clergy, exploitation of people in the name of devotions, cultification, superstitious and magical ceremonies, out-moded and irrelevant practices, over-spiritualization of religious doctrines, and deification of religious figures and saints, distort religion. We need religion for the liberation of humanity, but from the religion that does not liberate humanity we need liberation.

Ambedkar urges the Dalits to free themselves of such superstitious and magical religion and the fatalistic attitudes inculcated by the enslaving doctrines of *karma* and *samsara*.[66] These not only impoverish and enslave, they also entrap the minds. While Ambedkar bequeathed the

Dalits a religion of wisdom and compassion, a religion of loving service and self-sacrifice, and a religion of morality of love, to strive for the Kingdom of Righteousness, he condemned all superstitious practices. What is needed for salvation are not these but a critical, prophetic, liberative religion. A liberative religion alone can inspire and enlighten the people with wisdom, and empower them with detachment and love, to struggle for the political power, to transform the unjust structures, and to usher in the Dhamma Raj.

In short, the purpose of the liberative religion is to "teach the virtues of fellow-feeling, equality and liberty"[67] and thus build the Kingdom of Dhamma. Hence, the urgency for all the religions to purge themselves of the magical practices, outmoded cults and ceremonies, irrelevant institutions and traditions, outdated doctrines and dogmas, and unleash the liberative elements and the revolutionary potential that is present in all of them. Only then can they be effective paths to the Kingdom.

6.3.5. The Criteria to Judge Religions

The criterion to judge the value of religions is another important contribution of Ambedkar.[68] Although religions are equal in the sense none of them can claim to be exclusively supernaturally revealed, all of them are not equally same. Some religions are better than the others, at least in some respects if not all. There are differences in the values they propose as goals of life and in the means they possess. Even in a particular religion all the practices may not be good. These keep accumulating down the centuries. Some of them are blindly, followed though not applicable and relevant to our times and places, as they were meant for different times or places, or situations.

How are we to judge which of these religions are better than others? The promotion of social justice and human

liberation and welfare is the main criterion. Jesus utilised this criterion while declaring that the Sabbath is made for humans, and on many other occasions. In the tradition of the prophets of Israel, he insisted on love, mercy, justice, forgiveness and peace to be more important than religious ceremonies.[69]

The Philosophy of Religion of Ambedkar also, in the same vein, proposes justice and social welfare as the criterion to judge the religions. Paul Knitter, a liberative theologian of religion, has taken up the debate on the need for a criterion to evaluate religious practices.[70] He has, in dialogue with Liberation Theology, proposed the critical hermeneutic principle of justice to the poor as the criterion. While Knitter's suggestion still remains a proposal, Ambedkar's Dalit Critical Principle had been put to use and proved to be effective as the criterion to judge religions and ideologies. The promotion of justice to the Dalits and the oppressed non-persons is the best criterion to judge religions, ideologies or political and social events and activity.

6.4. Salient Features of Ambedkar's Model of Dalit Theology and Dalit Hermeneutics

6.4.1. Pathos-Praxis Based Dalit Theology

Ambedkar's theology is experience based. He did bear the stigma of the Untouchable and its insults. He was the victim of exploitation of the caste-system. He was refused place to stay, water to drink, vehicle to travel just because he was born in a particular community. Though a scholar of repute abroad, he had to bear the insults of the ignorant in his home state just because he was a Dalit.[71] He, like Moses, forsaking the positions that could have been his, opted to lead his people into the land of freedom. Unto the last he struggled for this mission. His theology/philosophy was therefore pathos-praxis based. His commitment to the liberation of Dalits prompted his critical reflection, motivated

and inspired all his studies and writings. He was no armchair philosopher/theologian; praxis-reflection was his methodology.

6.4.2. The Utilization of Dalit Critical Principle

Dalit Theology and Dalit Hermeneutics of Ambedkar progressed ahead along with Dalit Movement for justice and human dignity. He led *satyagrahas* for the right to drink water from a public pond forbidden to Dalits, to enter the temples closed for them, and to gain their economic rights. He organised the Dalits to capture political power through the class based Independent Labour Party formed in 1936 and the caste based Scheduled Caste Federation started in 1942. Through innumerable organizations, associations and the conferences of the Depressed Classes he led a protest movement, the first Dalit Movement in India led by a Dalit himself.[72] His reflections sprang from Dalit Movement. His writings though scholarly had same purpose, to liberate the Dalits. They were written from the Dalit perspective.

The *Dalit Critical Principle* was operative in all Ambedkar's activities and writings. This principle, derived from his personal experience and the struggle of the Dalit Movement, evaluates on the criterion of benefit to the Dalits. He judged every event in India, every decision taken, every reform initiated, and every change brought about, with the Dalit Critical Principle. Ambedkar's evaluation of religions and religious practices, ideologies, political parties and organizations was by the same criterion.

6.4.3. Hermeneutical Circle Operative

Ambedkar's Dalit Hermeneutics did complete the liberative *hermeneutical circle* that J.L. Segundo describes.[73] Ambedkar from his experience and the struggle of his people, the Dalits, comes to suspect the prevalent unjust social order, based on

the tenacious and dehumanizing caste system and its Hindu ideology of inequality, imposed on people as the sacred ideal scheme of divine governance. Realizing the inhumanity and the ungodliness of the whole system, he comes to suspect the scriptures that have sanctified, legitimatized and sanctioned such a diabolical tyranny. This exegetical suspicion leads to the reinterpretation of the scriptures and of religion itself. Later, leaving the job of reinterpreting the Hindu scriptures to Hindus themselves, he takes up the reinterpretation of Buddhism,[74] the ancient religion of the Dalits.

This process of Dalit Hermeneutics, therefore, begins with commitment, and option for the cause of a particular group of non-persons, the most oppressed of them all, progresses with critical suspicion of the ideological, theological and exegetical realities and completes the hermeneutical circle by its new interpretation of the reality and the scriptures with its Dalit Critical Principle, leading to a new solution, to a new creation with new meaning, and new significance of persons and life, of the text and the context, of the theory and praxis.

6.4.4. Comprehensive Social Analysis of Indian Reality

One of the important features of Ambedkar's Dalit Hermeneutics is its *comprehensive social analysis.* While the Marxians have paid little attention to the powerful Indian realities of culture, religion and above all the caste, his social analysis' gave them due importance. Not only colonialism and capitalism are the enemies of Indian people, the internal enemy of caste system is more pernicious. It is not just a division of labour but of the labourers, Ambedkar emphasised.

Caste system is not only a socio-cultural-religious phenomenon, he insisted that it is a system of economy, as

feudalism and capitalism are.[75] It is meant for the profit of one group of people who keep another group under slavery to exploit them and derive cheap and surplus labour. It also gives them access to land, and other means of production, besides the social status and political power. Ambedkar laments that while in the slave system the masters were responsible to the slave's welfare, in the caste system it is not even so.[76]

Indian Marxists have explained the caste phenomenon as the super-structure of feudal class society that is on its way out. They assert that caste is a matter of consciousness, an idea in the minds of the people, not a social material reality. To them, Ambedkar pointed out that it would not be possible to bring about a total revolution in India as long as caste exists. Caste would not allow the proletarian unity to take place, for, it divides the working class and keeps them antagonistic towards each other.[77]

The Marxists have also not taken the oppression of women seriously. Ambedkar showed that *Shudras* and women received the similar treatment in a caste ridden society, and their oppression was legitimized by the same *Manusmriti.*[78] Similarly, in his analysis, Ambedkar has also given due importance to culture and religion as it was shown in the previous chapters.[79]

6.4.5. Other Characteristics of Ambedkar's Dalit Hermeneutics

Enumerated below are some important characteristics of Ambedkar's Dalit Hermeneutics besides the ones just described. As most of them have already been sufficiently explicated in the previous chapters they are mentioned here only summarily.

6.4.5.1. Ambedkar in his reinterpretation of Buddhism tries to *return to the original sources* of Buddhist Scriptures and

strives to be faithful to the original life and message of Gautama Buddha.[80] He is aware of the various interpretations to which Buddhism has been subjected to. He consciously avoids them to strike a new relevant interpretation suitable for Dalit liberation and the welfare of the modern world.

6.4.5.2. As explained earlier the main hermeneutical principles Ambedkar utilized in the innovation of Neo-Buddhism are *socialism* and *scientific rationalism.*[81] He believed that "communism" is the most humane form of social order. But he preferred Buddhist Communism/ Socialism to the Marxian-Russain Communism/Socialism. Yet, he uses many Marxian economic theories in his reinterpretation. He also uses modern physics to reinterpret the age-old concepts of *samsara* and *karma.*

6.4.5.3. Ambedkar's utilization of Marxian and Scientific theories in his interpretation reveals his *openness to dialogue* and to learn from others. This open hermeneutical approach is also evident in his eagerness to present the Buddha in the life style of Jesus,[82] to adopt the Christian missionary methods, and reinterpret the task of *Bhikkus* and *Sangha* in terms of Christian ministry.[83]

6.4.5.4. Buddhist *middle path* has been used by Ambedkar often to offer a balanced and relevant reinterpretation of Buddhism.[84] Two important examples can be cited. Ambedkar insisted that poverty should not be idealized and sanctified by religions, rather the poor and the Dalits must be encouraged to acquire wealth while the rich must be urged to use wealth, in moderation. Ambedkar advises moderation in everything that we wish to do.[85] The reinterpretation of *ahimsa* is also based on this principle. He neither favours the absolute *ahimsa* of Jainism, nor the *himsa* path of Communism, but is ready to allow militancy and violence for self-defence and as the last resort to gain the human rights.[86]

6.5. Commendable Aspects of Ambedkarian Theology

Many aspects of Ambedkar's theological method and content deserve special mention and praise. These points, briefly outlined in this section, have been highlighted earlier in other sections. These sum up my appreciation of Ambedkar's philosophical/theological enterprise. The fact that Ambedkar undertook philosophical and theological work inspite of his busy schedule as an activist, politician, statesman and member of various committees, all of which demanded a lot of responsibility, attention and labour, itself is a great achievement on his part. Due to his hectic activity he was unable to produce a systematic philosophical/theological treatise.

In Ambedkar's approach to philosophical/theological task, we, the Dalit theologians and the liberation theologians, have much to learn. As for myself, I have great admiration for Ambedkar, for his love and zeal for the Kingdom, the commitment and struggle for the liberation of Dalits and human rights, and for his liberative approach to philosophy/theology. I learnt much from his critique of religions and ideologies. With no claim to be exhaustive, I list below the essential and commendable aspects of Ambedkar's Philosophy/Theology:

6.5.1. Ambedkarian Theology is the first modern attempt undertaken by a Dalit. His Dalit Movement was the first one launched in recent times by a Dalit himself. The other anti-caste movements were initiated by the reformers hailing either from the upper castes or *Shudra* and backward castes but not from the Untouchables. His was truly *a theology from the periphery.* Dalits live literally at the periphery of the villages and towns! Ambedkar's is the first Dalit Theology.[87]

6.5.2. His Theology sprang from Dalit Movement that struggles for humanity, identity, dignity, respect, self-reliance

and power. It articulated the moans and groans, the doubts and questions, the appeals and demands, the aspirations and struggles of the Dalits. It is truly *a People's Theology,* a theology of the people who are not counted as humans, who are faceless, powerless, poor and polluted; who are despised, deprived and dehumanized; who are, as Ambedkar described them, due to their geographical dislocation, the "broken people". They are even broken anthropologically.[88]

6.5.3. Ambedkar's is a *prophetic theology,* that denounced every form of oppression, especially the most inhumanist of all, the caste-oppression. It boldly and strongly condemned the causes of oppression and the persons responsible for its perpetuation. No religion, ideology, political party nor person was spared the trial. At the same time, his prophetic theology was spared announced the dawn of liberation to the Dalits and the oppressed, and inspired and empowered their struggles for a just, egalitarian, and moral social order.[89]

6.5.4. Theology of Ambedkar is *liberative, relevant, and contemporary.* It was not concerned with the irrelevant speculative abstract theories, nor with the study of past philosophical and theological systems for the pleasure of knowledge, and to satisfy intellectual curiosity. It faced the present problems of contemporary society and sought relevant solutions.[90]

6.5.5. Thus his theology is *praxis-based and action-oriented.* It is *practical,* leading to a concrete programme of action to annihilate caste oppression and economic exploitation. It resulted in *satyagrahas,* rallys, legal battles, conferences, political activity and other forms of non-violent militant transformative praxis. It is a *committed theology* with a Dalit option.[91]

5.5.6. Ambedkar's Theology is *hermeneutical.* The Dalit Critical Principle that he employed, not only unlocked the

religious interpretation of caste hierarchy, and the ideology of inequality imposed on the division of labour and on an outmoded stratification of the society, but also disclosed an innovate reinterpretation. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of religion, Buddhism and the Philosophy/Theology of Religion reveal his hermeneutical skills. His hermeneutical suspicion went beyond the Marxian suspicion, which failed to grasp the evil consequences of caste oppression and caste alienation. His reinterpretation of Buddhism, in accordance with modern scientific principles and socialistic revolutionary thrust is remarkable.[92]

6.5.7. Ambedkar's thinking and interpretation was also highly *critical.* He insisted that Philosophy of Religion should not only be descriptive but also critical. His Dalit Critical Principle was *radical* in its depth and extent. It sought the root causes of the problem, without stopping the diagnosis at the level of symptoms. And in its extent, the critique of Ambedkar targeted all the political parties, ideologies, religions, social reform movements, and the eminent social and political activists, even if they are popularly hailed as *mahatmas,* freedom fighters and social reformers.[93]

6.5.8. Theology of Ambedkar was both *agapic and sapiential.* Love and wisdom are like two wheels of his theological caravan. Both the Buddhist discerning wisdom and Christian loving service are emphasized by him. In his Theology "wisdom meets love", to enlighten as well as empower us, to serve and struggle with detachment and compassion.[94]

6.5.9. Ambedkar's Theology is not only *integral* in its synthesis of Christian love and Buddhist wisdom. There is also an integration of the secular scientific Enlightenment of the East and West. The modern Renaissant rational Enlightenment and the ancient Buddhist religious

Enlightenment are happily married. This is a new paradigm highly recommended to the Indians of secular democracy.[95] The dualisms between science and religion, secular and sacred, politics and spirituality, involvement and detachment, action and contemplation, material and spiritual, works and faith, social reality and the divine Kingdom do not exist in Ambedkar's *new integral holistic theological paradigm.*[96]

6.5.10. Ambedkar's Theology of Religion is praiseworthy on many counts. It has emphasized the *social* function of religion without neglecting to emphasize its necessity for *personal* growth. It laid more stress on *orthopraxis,* the right moral conduct based on love, than doctrines, cults, rituals and devotional practices. Many magical trappings of religion and doctrinal binding chains have been broken down by his theological axe and gotten rid of. The liberative, prophetic, critical dimension of religion has been emphasized by him. The contribution of religion to revolutionary struggle has been demonstrated by his Movement and Theology.[97]

6.5.11. Ambedkar's Theology is *humanistic and anthropological.* D.R. Jatava categorizes his thought as Social Humanism.[98] Ambedkar's main concern was to regain the full humanity deprived to people by caste oppression and sex discrimination, which are not only economic alienations but primarily anthropological alineations. In his Theology, Ambedkar gave importance to the common good, and the establishment of a humane social order, a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity of all people. *Wholistic human development* was much insisted upon. He would never rest satisfied with material well-being, and often reminded his people of the spiritual salvation, mental enlightenment, cultural transformation, social status, unity, love and peace, which are essential for happy and holy life. His religion is a religion of humanity, a religion at the service of humans to realize the humanness.[99]

6.5.12. Theology of Ambedkar is very much *contextual and cultural.* He would not accept wholesale, the imported Marxian theory, that does not take into account caste and religion which are very powerful and influential factors in the Indian context and culture.[100] He rejected also Islam and Christianity that are foreign and were attached to the anti-national and imperialistic countries. Their adoption by the Dalits would weaken the national independent movement he felt. Ambedkar was truly a staunch nationalist and an ardent patriot.[101] In his love for Indian and Dalit culture, he revived the ancient Indian Dalit religion which had become almost non-existent. By the revival of Buddhism, Ambedkar did a great service to the Dalits. The return of Buddhism not only gives identity and enlightenment to the Dalits, it has also revived the Dalit Dravidian, non-Aryan, non-Brahminic "Indic" culture, whose ancient religion was Buddhism.[102] It has exploded the myth of Hindus, who equate Indian culture with Hindu-Hindi culture, and India with Hindustan.

6.5.13. Ambedkar's theological approach was *analytical as well as synthesist.* His writings reveal his inquisitive mind, that would not rest satisfied with simplistic understanding, but would reach to the heart of the matter. Posing one question after another that takes him deeper, and deeper Ambedkr comes up with the real causes and reasons for the matter in discussion.[103] At the same time his Theology exhibits many points of synthesis. Steering clear of the existing "isms", ideologies and schools of thought, and assimilating the best from them, Ambedkar offers an *original* synthesis that follows the Buddhist *middle path.*[104] As already mentioned, there is a synthesis of the enlightenment of the East and the West in his thought. Similarly, in his Theology we find salient features of American Liberalism and Russian Socialism, individualism and collectivism, materialism and

spiritualism, scientific positivism and religious wisdom, blend together in synthesis.[105] His liberative praxis also uniquely combined in its strategy both the Gandhian *satyagraha* and Marxian class struggle. The social analysis of Ambedkar was again a blend of the economic analysis including Dialectical Historical Materialism, and the cultural analysis of religion, culture and social institution of caste.[106] His Dalit revolution included both the cultural revolution and social revolution.

6.5.14. Ambedkar's Theology is essentially *soteriological and eschatological.* Its aim and dream was to build up the Kingdom of Righteousness, *Dhamma Raj*, by perfecting the social order gradually. To begin with, socio-religious reform for equality, national independence, democratic constitutional forms of government, and state socialism are to be realized. The transformation of the social relationships and attitudes, based on the new value-system of liberty, equality and fraternity, is the foundation of the new just egalitarian society. Justice,- social, economic and political-, is to be secured for every member of the national and the global human family. Only then can humane-divine state of love and peace can reign in the universe, with blessedness and happiness for all creatures, the humans and the nature.[107] With this eschatological hope the Ambedkarian spiritual struggle for the Dhamma Raj strives ahead.

6.5.15. Another striking features in Ambedkar's Theology is *non-dogmatism and provisionalism.* As his guru, the Buddha, he strives hard to convince us to be rational and scientific, and not to believe anything on the word of someone else, because so and so said it, or because it is claimed to be a divine revelation. He made it clear to his people that he does not want blind followers, and that nothing of what he has written is perennial, infallible and dogmatic.[108] Instead, he calls attention many times to the Buddhist

principle of impermanence and constant change.[109] Hence, Ambedkar was also ready to admit that "There can be no finality in thinking".[110] A responsible person must be ready to unlearn and rethink, and not get enslaved by consistency which is a "virtue of an ass"; he wants neither himself nor us to belong to that category.[111]

6.5.16. At the same time, we also find his theological approach *universalistic.* It wishes the welfare of all people. It wants the end of class-caste struggle, so that all can live in peace and prosperity. Ambedkar urged the Dalits to strive not only for their own welfare, also for universal liberation and peace. The benefits of growth and social reform, according to Ambedkar, must not be usurped by a few but accure to all.[112] Ambedkar's Theology emphasized the common good, the just social order that wills secure justice and equality for all the citizens. It strives for the universal peace of the Kingdom.

6.6. Complementary Critique of Ambedkar's Approach

I find it extremely difficult to pen a critique of Ambedkarian theological approach. The main reason for this predicament is my admiration of Ambedkar and appreciation of his liberative praxis, theology, and methodology. I am so much in agreement with his thought that it is not easy to extricate and distance myself completely to make an "objective" critique. Conceding to the fact that totally "objective" criticism or theory is impossible, I realize that an academic criticism of Ambedkar's thought is not even tenable and justified. For, his philosophy/theology was not a systematic academic affair. It was meant for practical purposes, sporadically put out as the occasion arose to enlighten his people and the members of his movements and political parties. "He does not present his ideas on the subject in any systematic form and at one place", as Jatava admits.[113]

The following criticism has also the similar practical purpose in mind and so it stirs clear of purely speculative abstract questions. Undertaken in a spirit of dialogue, that strives to complement and carry forward the thought and the movement of Ambedkar, even if it be to a very short distance. This is a humble attempt, that is more of a search. The points made here are very provisional, to be corrected, verified, and complemented in dialogue with the Ambedkarians. My critique here also is limited to the theological approach of Ambedkar and the liberative praxis directly connected to it.

6.6.1. The Polemical Nature of his Theology

Most of the philosophical, theological, religious, ethical writings of Ambedkar, along with his sociological writings are polemical in character.[114] Even, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* his most systematic book on religion, contains many passages which are polemic and apologetic, besides the dialectical disputes of the Buddha.[115] This is primarily due to the fact that he had to defend his Dalit community which was neglected, insulted and exploited by practically every religion, ideology and political party in India.

Yet, had Ambedkar been little more positive in his approach we might have had a more systematic, direct, comprehensive and constructive philosophical/theological works from him. His *polemical* approach not only deprived him of the cooperation and collaboration with others but also affected his theology which failed to reveal the liberative elements of the oppressed who belonged to other religions and ideologies.[116]

6.6.2. Isolationistic and Sectarian Tendency

As K. Wilson points out, Ambedkar's struggle "proved to be isolationalistic and sectarian".[117] His movement was

strictly meant for the emancipation of the untouchable Dalits. Ambedkar admitted that he "followed the adage which says that it is better to be narrow-minded, if you wish to be enthusiastic about a cause which you wish to accomplish".[118] But this tendency in his thinking and action has led to many other limitations, mentioned in the following paragraphs. It resulted in the distanciation from the other revolutionary forces, with whom he could have forged a larger front for the liberative struggle.[119]

Towards the end of his life Ambedkar did try to correct this sectarian tendency and make alliance with other people and parties.[120] Ambedkar had to stand lone most of his life, with no support from other ideologists, parties, and religions, because of his non-compromising attitude. His strong critique of them all and avoidance, made them also shun him.[121] The adoption of Buddhism further isolated him and the Dalits from other people, though it entailed some advantages.[122]

6.6.3. One-sidedness in his Critique

"There is no doubt the undesirable behaviour-patterns created by caste and untouchability, prejudiced him against even some merits in Hinduism. In a sense, his concept of society fails to distinguish between what Hinduism is and what Hinduism has been, in the sense of caste behaviour-patterns".[123] This evaluation of Jatava, an expert in Ambedkrian studies is very true. Ambedkar though clarified that the target of his attack was only the Brahminic, caste-based Hinduism of *Manusmriti,* his hatred for caste led him to throw out all other forms of Hinduism along with its Brahminic form.[124]

In 1936 in his, *Annihilation of Caste,* he did suggest many reform measures to make Hinduism egalitarian. He also pointed out that the Hindu Scriptures such as the

Upanishads could render support for the new value system of liberty, equality and fraternity.[125] The Vedic Socialism of Swami Agnivesh[126] and the Vedantic Socialism of Swami Vivekananda[127] are some examples of the egalitarian trends in Hinduism, besides the Bhakti movements which are anti-caste.[128] Ambedkar's one-sidedness resulted in his blindness to the positive aspects contained in Hinduism, other religions and ideologies. He similarly rejects Gandhism with severe indictment and sees nothing good in it, while in practice he did adopt the *satyagraha strategy* of Gandhi.[129]

In general he has very few words of appreciation for other religions and ideologies. He does not empahsize the positive, liberative and constructive elements in them and accept them as partners, while he is all praise for Buddhism as the only remedy for all ills of the modern times. This again reveals his one-sided exaggerated extremist approach. Buddhism in its present forms is as oppressive as the other religions, which in their original form are also liberative like Buddhism.[130]

6.6.4. Shortcomings in the Interpretation of Neo-Buddhism

Though on the whole Ambedkar is justified in his reinterpretation of Buddhism, he has left a few gaps unfilled. Firstly, by not linking his community of Neo-Buddhists to any of the existing Buddhist sects or *Sanghas,* he created a gulf between them. He refused to accept the existing forms of Buddhism as they were not, he deemed, faithful to the original teaching of the Buddha.[131] This shortcoming has not only isolated the Neo-Buddhists depriving them of historical continuity, and a continuous tradition, it also deprived them of a *Sangha* and religious leadership to guide them.[132] The sudden demise of Ambedkar widened this gulf much more.

There is yet another hermeneutical gap unfilled by Ambedkar. He claims to jump twenty four centuries of Buddhist tradition to return to the original teaching of the Buddha and the pure Buddhist religion he founded. In the process he fails to prove that the *suttas* collected in his, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* really belonged to the time of the Buddha, or at least that they are faithful records of his teaching.[133] He has also failed to realize that it is not possible to make such a jump, without acknowledging and showing the continuity of the original experience, founder's inspiration, and the earliest tradition which in small measure had continued in the Buddhist communities down the centuries either in their scriptures, teachings or practices, inspite of their reinterpretations and distortions that resulted in varied forms.

Despite these shortcomings and gaps that are to be filled in, Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhism remains valid and justified, though some Buddhist monks may refuse to accept it.[134]

6.6.5. Overstress on the Caste Factor and the Religious Solution

Many followers of Ambedkar question his wisdom in adopting Neo-Buddhism as the means to annihilate caste.[135] Some feel that instead of pacifist meditational Buddhism a more militant religion should have been adopted.[136] As I have shown in the previous chapters, since Ambedkar rejected all other religions as theistic superstition, he had no other choice left than to revive Buddhism.[137] His scientific rationalism was also too strong.

There are also others who question the very analysis of Ambedkar that over-stresses the religious and psycho-cultural causes that legitimize the caste-system, while underplaying the economic causes.[138] This religious approach to the whole problem, we must admit, has led Ambedkar to

give more importance to socio-religious reform and the caste struggle. It left him with little time to organize a united caste-class struggle in a big way for the transformation of the socio-economic structure. His religious conversion just a few months before his death has also created an impression that he finally chose a religious solution to the caste problem neglecting other means of emancipation.[139]

I contend that this is not true to the facts. On the very day of his conversion, Ambedkar was planning to contest the next general election and was trying to reorgnise his party of Schedule Caste Federation into a broad based Republican Party of India, to gain political power for the Dalits as well as the other oppressed.[140] He was not taking up political *sanyasa.* All the same, he is still responsible for creating such an impression and not emphasizing sufficiently the caste-class political and economic struggle.

6.6.6. Annihilation of Caste or its Humanization?

The terrible suffering, pain and pathos of cultural deprivation, economic exploitation, social ostracism, and political domination caused by the ruthless monsterious caste-system, made Ambedkar, its hapless victim, whole-heartedly hate the caste system and anything or anyone connected with its perpetuation. As he admits, such hatred for injustice is a must for the activists who wish to fight for a just and egalitarian order.[141] Yet it should not, as it was in the case of Ambedkar, make one blind to the advantages, though few, of the *jati*/caste-system.[142] Here we are not refering to the Brahminic *varna vivastha,* caste-social order, the inegalitarian hierarchical ideology, slave system, and the system of untouchability which must be totally abolished. It is due to some advantages that caste-system, in its present form of *jatis,* still survives and is on the flourish, even in our modern times leading to gruesome atrocities and gaining political clout.[143]

Some of the advantages of *jati*/caste-system are: the identity it gives to a community, clan or person; the sense of security, sense of belonging, fellowship, the cooperative group occupation and ecological economic enterprise, and community feeling it offers. The collective spirit of caste ethics, though sectarian and leads often to group selfishness, does urge the members of a *jati* to come to the rescue of each other in solidarity and unity. These beneficial aspects of caste are seen in all *jati* groups, though in various degrees. These can be lost if caste-system is completely destroyed without replacing it with some other form of communities or groups. Thus the danger of individualism, that has already affected the Western societies may befall India too, destroying the social ecology.[144]

Should we not then emphasize the humanization of castes/*jatis* more than their annihilation, as K. Wilson suggests?[145] When all the castes respect each other as equals and do justice to them economically and politically, will not the sting and the stigma of caste be removed? Can we hope for peaceful co-existence of castes that Wilson calls for?:

> It is my assumption that Ambedkar were to live today, he would have advocated not annihilation of castes but humanization of Castes. For, caste as such is a neutral phenomenon. We have to hasten the process of subjecting both the caste system and the authority of Indian elitistic thought to humanistic critique. When castes are humanized, *i.e.,* when all castes could celebrate their respective unique identity and humanity, real democratic foundations will be laid for genuine human transactions and relations. The human face of Castes surfaces in their co-existence and functions as a sort of common wealth of castes, where every caste, functions on an equal footing. When human dimension dominates Castes may witheraway.[145]

6.7. Conclusion

Ambedkar's model of Dalit Theology and Hermeneutics is a good model available for us in India to emulate. We need to follow Ambedkar's methodology not only to learn from the great master and achieve what he did, also to carry forward his struggle, his Movement and his Theology, the Dalit revolution and the liberation of all.

NOTES

1. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 201.
2. See, *ibid.,* pp. 318-319.
3. Cf. *ibid.,* p. 79.
4. Ambedkar's support of minorities is very clear in his interventions in the Round Table Conference. He considered Dalits also a separate community, a minority, along with Muslims and Christians. But Gandhi, as a member of the Minorities Committee of the Round Table Conference was unwilling to recgonize, except Muslims and Sikhs, others like the Christians and Anglo-Indians as Minority. Much less was he prepared to admit that the Dalits are a minority. See, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 2, pp. 609, and 655-656; see also, D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 449-500. For a brief account of Ambedkar's efforts for women liberation, see G.S. Lokhande, *B.R. Ambedkar – A Study in Social Democracy,* pp. 143-156.
5. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Vol. 2, pp. 164-165.
6. Cf. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 318-319; see also, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, pp. 57-58; D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 86-93 and 231-269; and G.S. Lokhande, *B.R. Ambedkar – A Study in Social Democracy,* pp. 50-63. Ambedkar envisions communism which is a state of classless—casteless society where morality and Dhamma reign and love and peace prevail, see section, 3.4.2.
7. As quoted in D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 241.
8. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 219.

9. See note 6 above; and D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* Agra, Phoenix Pub. House, 1965, pp. 81-160.
10. Cf. Lokhande, *B.R. Ambedkar, A Study in Democracy,* pp. 164-169.
11. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 197-246.
12. Cf. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 301.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Vol. 2, p. 164.
15. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 201.
16. *Ibid.,* p. 199.
17. *Ibid.,* p. 202.
18. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 170.
19. Cf. *Ibid.,* pp. 156 and 165.
20. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 296.
21. *Ibid.,* p. 202.
22. *Ibid.,* p. 301.
23. *Ibid.,* p. 214.
24. *Ibid.,* pp. 318-319.
25. See section 3.3.3.
26. Cf. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 200-203.
27. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 83.
28. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 201.
29. *Ibid.,* p. 82.
30. *Ibid.,* p. 78.
31. *Ibid.,* p. 319.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Cited in D.R. Jatava, *To the Critics of Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 91-92.
34. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Vol. 2, p. 138.
35. Cf. Jatava, *To the Critics of Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 93.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 368-369.

38. See note 35 above; Ambedkar was dissatisfied with Indian Constitution, portions of which were written "much against my will" and he offered to burn it out; see D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 449.
39. See section 3.4.2.
40. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 156-158.
41. For a brief study of this strategy, see V.T. Rajshekar, *Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Three Commandments, Educate, Agitate, Organise: Its Essence and Consequence,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1989.
42. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 201.
43. *Ibid.,* p. 202.
44. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 351.
45. *Ibid.,* p. 235.
46. Cited by D.R. Jatava, *To the Critics of Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 136; D. Keer affirms that, "His religion and politics went hand-in-hand", *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 522.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 87.
48. This is the reason why Ambedkar desired to politicize Buddhism and bring out its social thrust. Cf. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 490.
49. See section 2.3.
50. See section 2.4.2; cf. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 226.
51. See section 2.4.
52. See R. Panikkar and A. Koothothil, "Man and Religion", *Jeevadhara* 11, 61 (1981), pp. 7-11; and J.L. Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies,* New York, Orbis Books, 1977, pp. 25-30.
53. See section 2.2.
54. See section 2.2.4; see Guenter Lewy, *Religion and Revolution,* New York, Oxford University Press, 1974 and Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts,* New York, Orbis Books, 1982.
55. See section 2.2.3.

56. See section 3.3.3. Also see A. Thumma, *Prema Yoga,* Mangalore, 1981.
57. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 267.
58. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 231.
59. *Ibid.* See A. Thumma, *Prema Yoga.*
60. Cf. *ibid.,* pp. 233-234.
61. Cf. *ibid.,* p. 301.
62. Cf. *ibid.*
63. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 259-260.
64. See section 3.3.3.2.
65. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 442.
66. See, D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 233-235.
67. *Ibid.,* p. 273.
68. See section 2.5.
69. Cf. J.L. Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies,* pp. 40-59.
70. Cf. Paul Knitter, "Towards a Liberation Theology of Religion", in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* London, SCM Press, 1988, pp. 190 and 193-194. He begins the discussion on this subject already in his, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions,* New York, Orbis Books, 1985.
71. See D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 236-237, and 523. For Ambedkar's praxic-thinking, see D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. i-ii.
72. For a brief survey of anti-caste movements, see, D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 19-25.
73. See, J.L. Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology,* New York, Orbis Books, 1976, pp. 8-9.
74. D. Keer has presented Ambedkar as a Protestant Hindu who strove for the reform of Hinduism. See, *Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 522-523. But it is not so. After 1935 Ambedkar declared that he and the Dalits are not Hindus and "to reform Hin-

duism is neither our aim nor our field of action." See, *Why Go for Conversion?*, p. 18; and *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, p. 80.

75. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, pp. 47-48. Ambedkar considers untouchability as the worst form of slavery, see *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 16.
76. *Ibid.,* Vol. 5, p. 17.
77. See section 3.4.2.1.
78. See *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 429-437.
79. See section 3.4.2.
80. See section 5.2.
81. See sections 5.5. and 5.6.
82. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, p. 166.
83. See D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 506-508.
84. *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* p. 82.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.,* pp. 250-251; see section 3.4.2.2.
87. Dalit Theology, following the example of Ambedkar, has already become a movement in India. Following works of the movement are noteworthy: M.E. Prabhakar, ed., *Towards a Dalit Theology,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1988; A.P. Nirmal and V. Devasagayam, eds., *A Reader in Dalit Theology,* Madras, Gurukul, 1990; X. Irudayaraj, ed., *Emerging Dalit Theology,* Madurai, Tamilnadu Theological College and Jesuit Theologate, 1990; A.P. Nirmal, ed., *Towards a Common Dalit Ideology,* Madras, Gurukul, 1990; V. Devasahayam, ed., *Frontiers of Dalit Theology,* Chennai, Gurukul, 1997; and J. Massey, ed., *Indigeneous People: Dalits, Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate,* Delhi, ISPCK, 1996.
88. For an understanding of what is meant here by "People's Theology" see *Jeevadhara* 22, 129 (May 1992); A. Thumma, *Voices of the Victims: Movements and Models of People's Theology,* Delhi, ISPCK, 1999; and A. Thumma, *Wisdom of the Weak: Foundations of People's Theology,* Delhi, ISPCK, 2000.

89. D. Keer draws a comparison between Ambedkar and Moses; see, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 493.
90. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. iv.
91. Ambedkar often lays stress on his option for Dalits; see D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 525; *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* vol. 1, pp. 77, 105; Jatava affirms that his philosophy was action based. See. *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. i-ii.
92. See sections 5.3. and 6.4.
93. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 6.
94. See section, 5.4; For dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity in a similar vein, see A. Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism,* New York, Orbis Books, 1988. Unfortunately the dialogue between Christians and Neo-Buddhists in India is not seem to be taking place.
95. See Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Enlightenment East and West: Pointers in the Quest for India's Secular Identity,* Simla, I.I.S.A., 1989.
96. See, D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 256-260.
97. See section 2.2.4. and 6.3. A. Pieris describes religiousness as "a revolutionary urge" or instinct in the humans; see *An Asian Liberation Theology,* New York, Orbis Books, 1988, pp. 107 and 108.
98. See D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 4-5, and 261-269.
99. *Ibid.,* pp. 265-267.
100. See sections 3.4.2. and 6.4. On contextuality of Ambedkar's thought see D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 2.
101. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 45-80.

102. *Marathi Dalitha Sahitya*, Marathi Dalit Literature Movement, a unique one of its kind, was inspired by Ambedkar; for a collected translations of modern Marathi Dalit literature, see Arjun Dangle, ed., *Poisoned Bread*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1992. Ambedkar has also inspired the revival of non-Brahminic "Indic" culture. For an anthropological study of this see R.S. Khare, *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology Identity, and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1984. "Indic" culture and tradition begins with the pre-Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, Yogic ascetic tradition. It is distinct from Brahminic-Hindu Hindi Sanskritic tradition. "Indic" culture belongs to Indus valley civilization which was non-Aryan and it is from this the name India is derived. Hindu culture is only one of the cultures of India, the others being the Dalit, Dravidian and various Tribal cultures; see *Ibid.*, pp. 6-8, 139-143, and 150-151. For a clear discussion on the subject, see Donald E. Smith, *India, As a Secular State*, Princeton, Princeton University Press (1963), 1967, chapter 13: "Hinduism and Indian Culture", pp. 372-378. On Ambedkar's influence on cultural revival, see, D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar*, p. 2.
103. The analysis of Ambedkar is also *scientific and historical* in its method: See, D.R. Jatva, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar*, pp. 39-42.
104. See section 6.4.5.
105. Cf. D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar*, pp. 2 and specially, 243.
106. Sharad Patil, the founder leader of Satya Shodak Communist Party and an expert in Indian economic history, acknowledges that non-Brahminic Ambedkarian approach is a more advanced epistemology, a new philosophy and new methodology; Cf. his "Non-Brahmin and Dalit Movements and their implications for Anti-Caste Struggle", in Philip Mathew and Ajit Murican, eds., *Religion, Ideology and Counter-Culture*, Bangalore, Horizon book, 1987, pp. 207-226.

107. See section 6.2.1. The eschatological here does not mean the realization "after life" or "other-worldly" as it is understood in Christian theology. In Ambedkarian theology it should be taken to mean *utopian* (not in perjerative sense) *and transcendental* which go beyond the present existential historical condition, leading to a better, fuller and total wholeness, welfare, holiness and happiness of all in this world.
108. Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 489; D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 6.
109. See, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, p. 442 where Ambedkar records the important principles: "Nothing is infallible. Nothing is binding forever. Everything is subject to inquiry and examination. Nothings is final. Everything is subject to the law of causation. Nothing is permanent or sanatan. Everything is subject to change. Being is always Becoming." See also, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 169, 370, 388, 399, and 415.
110. D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 3.
111. *Ibid.*
112. Cf. *ibid.,* p. 293.
113. *Ibid.,* p. 3.
114. Cf. *Ibid.,* p. 3.
115. See for instance, *The Buddha and His Dhamma,* pp. 156-157, 159, 351-364, and 370-371.
116. For example, see, Ashgar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology, Essays on Liberative Elements in Islam,* New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1990, which brings out the liberative aspects of Islam that Ambedkar considered unprogressive, non-reformist and fundamentalistic.
117. K. Wilson, *The Political Philosophy of the Oppressed Indians,* Hyderabad, Booklinks Corporation, 1983, p. 31.
118. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar,* Vol. 1, p. 105.
119. See note 117 above.
120. Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 498-499; see D.R. Jatava, *The Political Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* pp. 235-236.

121. To get an idea of the dislike and criticism of Ambedkar, see D.R. Jatava, *To the Critics of Dr. Ambekdar.*
122. For a debate on this, see Sociological studies compiled in T.S. Wilkinson and M.M. Thomas, *Ambedkar and the Neo-Buddhist Movement,* Bangalore, CISRS, 1972, which stress the advantages. The disadvantages resulting in the isolation and opposition between the Dalits and other caste people is highlighted by C. Parvathamma, "Ambedkar's Analysis of the Hindu Social Order", *The Socio-Economic Transformation of India — Dr. Ambedkar's Vision,* Darwad, Karnataka University, 1983, pp. 14-15. A more balanced view on the subject is found in E. Zelliot, "Buddhism and Politics in Maharashtra," Donald E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion,* Princeton, Princeton University Press, (1966), 1969, pp. 191-212.
123. D.R. Jatava, *The Social Philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 100.
124. *Why Go for Conversion?,* p. 18.
125. Cf. *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 1, pp. 76-80, esp. p. 78.
126. See, Swami Agnivesh's article on the subject in *Seminar* 339 (1987), an issue on "Rethinking Theology".
127. See the writings of Swami Vivekananda, *Caste, Culture and Socialism,* Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1988, pp. 95-108 and the essays in *Proletariat! Win Equal Rights,* Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1984, pp. 9-20.
128. For a survey of anti-caste Bhakti cults of modern times, see Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets — a Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions,* Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1965.
129. Ambedkar Acknowledges that it was Gandhi who devised the weapon of *Satyagragha;* cf. *Writings and Speeches,* p. 252.
130. For an account of religions as liberative movements and political weapons, see Asgar Ali Engineer, ed., *Religion and Liberation,* Delhi, Ajanta Publications, 1989; Stan Lourdusamy, *Religion as a Political Weapon,* Calcutta, Multi

Book Agency, 1990; and Paul Puthanangady, *Towards an Indian Theology of Liberation,* Bangalore, NBCLC, 1986.

131. See section 5.2.
132. Adelefiske confirms these facts in, "Scheduled Caste Buddhist Organizations," in J. Michael Mahar, ed., *The Untouchables in Contemporary India,* Tucson, The University of Arizona Press, 1972, pp. 122-123.
133. In his *The Buddha and His Dhamma* Ambedkar puts together many Buddhist *suttas* and incidents of Buddha's life without giving their sources. It is a compilation from the hundreds of books he had collected and read on the subject.
134. For the Buddhist monk's critique of Ambedkar's interpretation of Buddhism and its refutation, see D.R. Jatava, *To the Critics of Dr. Ambedkar,* pp. 52-67.
135. Such thinkers feel that religious solution alone is inadequate. See K. Wilson, *The Political Philosophy of the Oppressed Indians,* p. 31; and Shyam Sunder, *They Burn,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1987, p. 10.
136. Cf. V.T. Rajshekar, *Ambedkar and His Conversion,* Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1983, pp. 91-110. V.T. Rajshekar opines that since "Buddhism is a dead religion" Islam, Christianity or Sikhism should have been preferred by Ambedkar.
137. See section 3.3.2.
138. See K. Wilson, *The Political Philosophy of the Oppressed Indians,* pp. 3-4, and 31-34. Many of the Symposium participants whose papers are published in *The Socio-Economic Transformation of India — Dr. Ambedkar's Vision,* subscribe to this view.
139. D.R. Jatava also holds that in the last phase of his life Ambedkar stressed religious reform, while in the first phase upto 1930 he had stressed social reform, and after that in the second phase political reform was emphasized: "... by 1951, there developed in his mind a strong feeling that *social emancipation* and *political aspiration* must be subor-

dinated to *religious reform", The Social Philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar,* p. 31; see also pp.26-32.

140. Cf. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 498.
141. Cf. Ambedkar's preface to his, *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah,* (1943), *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 5, pp. 208-209.
142. For a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of caste-system, see J. Murdoch, *Review of Caste in India,* Jaipur, Prem Rawat, 1977.
143. See section 1.1. for an understanding of politicization of caste; see Rajni Kothari, *Caste in Indian Politics,* New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1970.
144. No wonder Louis Dumont considers the 'holism' of caste system as a solution to the Western individualism, see his, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications,* Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1988. For a critique of his position, see Victor S. D'Souza, *Inequality and its Perpetuation, A Theory of Social Stratification,* New Delhi, Manohar Prasad, 1981, pp. 163-176.
145. Cf. K. Wilson, "The Post-Ambedkar Ambedkarism", p. 4 (a handout of a paper presented by him in a seminar at CLRI, Madras, in April, 1992).
146. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 7

Dalit Revolution with Religious Empowerment

Know Truth as Truth and Untruth as Untruth
*— **Buddha** quoted by Ambedkar*

Truth Will Set You Free
*— **Jesus** (Jn. 8.31)*

7.1. Summary

As envisaged, this study examined Ambedkar's interpretation of the role of religion in Dalit revolution. It has now become clear that he insists on the necessity of religion for the preservation and progress of life to hold the society together under a common ideal value-system and morality, for the promotion of justice and social welfare, and for the cultural revolution and psychological transformation of the mind.

The religious conversion of Dalits to the newly interpreted, liberative, scientific, socialistic neo-Buddhism innovated by Ambedkar, was part of the Dalit revolution seeking human dignity, identity and self-respect. This has been discussed in the foregone chapters, along with Ambedkar's reasons for rejecting other religions and ideologies. With proper examples, the liberative hermeneutical principles he utilized in reinterpreting Buddhism were clarified. The study also demonstrated that in Ambedkar's thought the Dalit Critical Principle serves as the criterion to evaluate and judge and usefulness, value and the effectiveness of religions and ideologies. The last chapter of the study attempted

at an appraisal, in humility and in the spirit of dialogue of Ambedkar's great mission as the liberator of Dalits, his Dalit Movement and his Theology/Philosophy and Hermeneutics.

The study has made it clear that a purely religious struggle and religious solution and conversion alone cannot liberate Dalits. The total revolution that can radically transform the present unjust non-egalitarian socio-economic structure has to begin from socio-cultural revolution and develop into caste-class political struggle. But, religions can assist the process of cultural revolution, that is essential for the socio-political revolution as Ambedkar insisted. Religions can liberate if they free themselves from the politicians' wicked grip, from the lure of capitalistic and consumeristic values, from the burden of elite institutions and luxurious life-style, from irrational superstitions and magical rites, and from the metaphysical speculative dogmatic doctrines.

7.2. Conclusion

Religions can, as Ambedkar desired, bring cultural transformation, mental freedom and psychological empowerment to the Dalits and the oppressed. The critical and liberative elements that can empower the Dalits and unite all the revolutionary forces are present in all the religions. Many of these religions, especially Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, sprang up as the counter-cultural movements.[1] As Ambedkar acknowledged, they are basically egalitarian in approach. The Hindu Bhakti sects of Middle Ages also contain many egalitarian elements to support the liberative struggles.

Religions in India must not stand in the way of the unity of the Dalits, oppressed and the activists who should be encouraged to rise above their religious affiliations to struggle

for the Kingdom. Religions should avoid interfering in secular political affairs and avoid airing opinions on purely scientific issues. It has become clear to us with the Masjid-Mandir controversy, that over-stress of communal religious matters, the utilization of politics for religious purposes[2] and the exploitation of religion for petty party politics lead to fundamentalism and communal riots[3] and distract us from the essential concerns of equality, justice, love and peace.

The other extreme of the purely secular approach to liberation, drains out from us the sap of spiritual power, moral strength, religious motive forces, and the collective wisdom of the religio-cultural traditions of many centuries. If fanaticism, fundamentalism, and communalism[4] are replaced by dialogue, social concern and liberative struggle for justice, religions can be tangible signs and sacraments of the Kingdom of Righteousness.

Indian religions will be able to unleash the revolutionary potential in their religious traditions, through liberative hermeneusis done by the Dalits and the oppressed, who are the subjects and agents of liberative theologies. It is they with their pathos and praxis for humanization, who can critique and reinterpret the original sources, as Ambedkar did in the case of Buddhisms. The Peoples' Theologies of liberation thus formulated into different models of theologies of liberation such as Dalit Theology, Adivasi/Tribal Theology, Womanist/Feminist Theology, will in their turn, help to conscientize and empower the Dalits and the oppressed for revolutionary action.[6] This is a dialectical process of praxis and reflection.[7]

In this manner, the religions in India can help in the conscientization, empowerment, organization and unification of the Dalits and the oppressed, for the liberative political struggle. They should utilize the critical hermeneuti-

cal principles given by Ambedkar to evaluate their activities. All religions could join together in dialogue to liberate the Dalits and the oppressed of India,[8] who have been so far exploited by them.[9] They should serve as the conscience of the nation and denounce every form of injustice. Religions should constantly remind the people of the ultimate goal of building up the Kingdom of Righteousness, the Dhamma Raj. For, as Ambedkar asserted, "Religion is not the appellation for (such) an unjust order. *Religion and Slavery are incompatible.*"[10]

NOTES

1. See, Stan Lourdusamy, *Religion as Social Protest,* Calcutta, Multi, 1993; M.R. Arulraja, *Jesus the Dalit,* Hyderabad, Volunteer, 1996; and A.A. Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology.*
2. Cf. Stan Lourdusamy, *Religion as Political Weapon,* pp. 1-2.
3. Cf. Asgar Ali Engineer, *On Developing Theory of Communal Riots,* Bombay, Institute of Islamic Studies, 1984; Asgar Ali Engineer, ed., *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India,* Hyderabad, Sangam Books, 1984; see also, M.J. Akbar, *Riot After Riot.*
4. Cf. Asgar Ali Engineer and Moin Shakir, eds., *Communalism in India,* Delhi, Ajanta Publications, 1985.
5. See, V. Devasahayam, *Outside the Camp, Biblical Studies in Dalit Perspective,* Chennai, Gurukul, 1992; and A. Thumma, *Springs from the Subalterns: Patterns and Perspectives in People's Thelogy,* Delhi, ISPCK, 1999.
6. See, A. Thumma, *Voices of the Victims: Movements and Models in People's Theology;* and M. Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia,* Anand, GSP, 1997.
7. See, A. Thumma, *Wisdom of the Weak: Foundations of People's Theology.*

8. See X. Irudayaraj, ed., *Liberation and Dialogue,* Bangalore, Claretian Publications, 1989.
9. See, James Massey, *Dalits in India — Religions as Source of Bondage or Liberation,* Delhi, ISPCK, 1996; and J.C. Webster, *Religion and Dalit Liberation,* Delhi, Manohar, 1999.
10. D. Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar,* p. 92. My emphasis.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

The new millennium has been declared as the Ambedkar Era. The beginning of this millennium is witnessing the confrontation of the secular egalitarian liberative forces led by the Dalit Bahujans, and the fundamentalistic exclusivistic dominant Hindutva forces led by the Sangh Parivar. Ambedkarian Dalit Theology/Ideology has come to fore again in this context. This book presents the core of Ambedkarism/Dalitism, its basic principles, vital values, and the essential methodology of its action and reflection. It discusses the function of religion in society, the role of religion in Dalit Revolution, and the place of religions and ideologies in the transformative process of total liberation for all.

This book is the fourth in the serious on People's Theology by the author published by the ISPCK. The others are:

1. *VOICES OF THE VICTIMS: Movements and Models of People's Theology, 1999.*
2. *SPRINGS FROM THE SUBALTERNS: Patterns and Perspectives in People's Theology, 1999.*
3. *WISDOM OF THE WEAK: Foundations of People's Theology, 2000.*

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